

## Technoblade's Entirely Average Babysitting Gig

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/37672720) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/37672720>.

Rating:	<a href="#">General Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings</a>
Category:	<a href="#">Gen</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Dream SMP</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Wilbur Soot &amp; Technoblade &amp; TommyInnit &amp; Phil Watson</a> , <a href="#">Technoblade &amp; TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Technoblade &amp; Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Wilbur Soot &amp; Technoblade</a> , <a href="#">Clay   Dream &amp; Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF)</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Wilbur Soot</a> , <a href="#">Clay   Dream (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Sapnap (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Kristin Rosales Watson</a> , <a href="#">Niki   Nihachu</a> , <a href="#">Jack Manifold</a> , <a href="#">Darryl Noveschosch</a> , <a href="#">Zack Ahmed</a>
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Language:	English
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Stats:

Published: 2022-03-12 Completed: 2022-05-20 Words: 34,267 Chapters: 3/3

# Technoblade's Entirely Average Babysitting Gig

by [opheliabloo](#)

## Summary

“Perfect. Absolutely perfect.” Phil takes a scone, nodding. “Have you taken out any life insurance lately?”

Techno only laughs. Phil laughs too. They laugh for approximately fifteen seconds. It’s weird.

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or: techno takes on a sketchy babysitting gig to make some money. he’s not entirely sure they’re not trying to murder him.

# Personal Profit Over Personal safety

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The ad is simple. Deceptively simple.

Techno stares at it for the three entire minutes his noodle cup is microwaving.

*Babysitter needed! Two boys aged 9 and 12. \$200/hr. Reply for details.*

It's definitely a scam. It has to be. It's so unbelievable that it's practically *laughable*. Techno refreshes the website a few times between spoonfuls of scalding chicken-flavoured broth, half-expecting to see the ad be edited to a more reasonable 20\$ an hour or disappear entirely, yanked from existence by site mods for the crime of being the stupidest scam to ever grace the planet. But it doesn't. It remains at the top of the job listing site, singing its siren song of exorbitant financial profit. *Report it*, the angel on Techno's shoulder says. *It's definitely spam. Spam isn't in the bible. Only cheating and lying and murder and stuff.*

He's halfway to considering it before the devil on his other shoulder pipes up. *Send in your resume. Nothing bad can happen.*

The devil on Techno's shoulder feeds on rent and debt and the weight of the approaching midterm season bearing down on Techno's back. Needless to say, it's a lot, *lot* bigger than the angel. *What's the worst that can happen?* He types up a quick email — short, polite, with his resume neatly linked in the attached folders — and fires it off. A laugh bubbles up in his chest as he leans back against his chair, feeling his sore back creak like a rusty hinge. He is *way* too fucking tired to be looking for jobs. Thanks to a particularly stubborn essay conclusion that took half the night, his plans to end his slow-building financial ruin and perhaps give him a chance of owning a house one day had had to be put off. He isn't quite sure why he isn't in bed, why he isn't showering or doing laundry or enriching himself as a human person in some other way, but he's already guzzled down an energy drink and eaten himself sick on cornerstore candy — sleep wasn't coming for hours whether he likes it or not.

His phone buzzes. The email notification pops up on his laptop a second later.

## PHIL MURDER

*RE: Babysitting Job*

Techno clicks on it immediately.

## PHIL MURDER

*RE: Babysitting Job*

*Hello Techno Blade;*

“My name is spelled correctly on my resume *and* on the email signature.” Techno takes a sip of his noodle cup. It’s still scalding. “No rest for the wicked, man.”

*See address listed. 11pm Monday. 500\$ for attendance.*

*- Phil Murder (like the crows not the death)*

The address isn’t familiar — almost a twenty-minute drive out of town. When Techno googles it, his phone map icon lands in the middle of a thick forest. There isn’t even a *road*.

Two things become strikingly clear: It is *definitely* a scam, and he is *definitely* going to be murdered.

Techno RSVPs ‘yes’ without thinking twice.

Sue him. He’s *broke*. He could at least sell his harrowing story of survival to Netflix and make big money that way if the job posting truly is a front for a serial killer.

(Or he could just die. That would work too. Dead men don’t have student loan debts.)

With his gruesome fate now set in stone, Techno checks the time on his phone. It’s just past 3 in the morning. *Twenty hours until I meet my certain death. That’s more than enough to get one last solid night’s sleep.* He stretches his arms above his head. The bubbling of fruity energy drink on his tongue tastes victorious. *Or maybe it’s just the carbonation. I’ve slept with worse mortal dread before.*

Twenty hours passes in the blink of an eye, and by the time Techno finds himself seated in his car, staring up at what has to be the fanciest manor he has ever laid eyes on, he has had three hours of sleep and another energy drink. Same thing. Taking a deep breath, he unlocks his car door. *I should have memorized the Lord’s Prayer or something.* The ground doesn’t immediately open to swallow him up when he plants his feet on the gravel, so he considers that his first win of the night. Nobody emerges from the depths of the shadowy forest swinging an axe when he gets out, smooths his shirt and locks his car door closed behind him, so he considers that his second win of the night.

He passes by a very detailed humanoid gargoyle crouched on one of the second-story balconies and stares at it for a bit as he waits for 11pm to arrive. Now, that isn’t *technically* any sort of win for him, but the gargoyle is impressively carved and Techno almost swears its big, beady eyes are genuinely *looking* at him, so he considers it his third win of the night anyway. He isn’t one to take proper craftsmanship for granted.

One of the massive, ornately carved doors swings open as Techno is reaching for it to knock, momentarily blinding him with the sudden light. He blinks, and there is a man in front of him, grinning widely. “Hello!” He exclaims. His cheerful intensity hits Techno with the force of a truck. “Come in! Come in!”

*Lord, give me bread or whatever.* The door slams shut behind him the moment he’s out of the way, so escape is no longer an option. If anything goes awry, Techno only has his brawn and his wits to get him out alive.

Yeah, he’s fucked.

“I am so—“ The man grasps Techno’s hand in both of his and shakes Techno’s arm straight out of its socket— “Happy that you arrived safely. Come in. Come in.”

The man — Phil Murder, Techno remembers from the ad — is already moving farther into the foyer, beckoning him to follow. He is possibly the strangest-looking person Techno has ever seen in his 20-something years on the planet: he’s dressed like the Monopoly Man’s unstable cousin, complete with a black vest tailored with gold stitching, pressed black slacks and, despite the fact that they are indoors, a striped bucket hat. He is also wearing a floor-length black cloak, which wouldn’t be massively out of place given the rest of his unique attire, but the man is quite obviously trying (and failing. Like, *really* failing) to hide a massive pair of black wings beneath it. If anything, the cloak is just making them more obvious. He can’t even keep them still. He looks like a demented, writhing hunchback. The secondhand embarrassment is too much to bear within moments. “Cool wings,” Techno says. Phil pauses, bug-eyed. “Your wings. They’re cool.”

A painfully long silence stretches between them. Phil looks him up and down, eyes narrowed skeptically, before unclipping and throwing off his cloak in one fluid motion. He never breaks eye contact once. It’s weird. “How did you know I have wings?” Phil asks, raising his eyebrows.

“I saw them,” Techno replies. “With my eyeballs.”

Phil seems satisfied with his response, if not a little perplexed, and his excited demeanour returns in full force. He leads Techno down a hall to the left, giving him a detailed history of every single one of the many paintings, vases, statues, and other expensive items he has lining every spare inch of the walls. Techno notices the walls also have claw marks on them. The ceilings do as well. So do the doorframes.

He opts to mention nothing. He’d hate to overstep.

“Got any family in town, Techno Blade?” Says Phil as they enter an expensive-looking kitchen. It opens, unsurprisingly, into an equally expensive-looking living room, which Phil motions ahead for Techno to go sit in. Techno sits in the nearest chair — a plush leather thing nicer than his entire bed — and twists in it to watch Phil place a teapot and several teacups onto a glass tray. “No,” he says. “My family’s all out east. I’m just here for school. And you can call me Techno.”

Phil seems pleased with that answer. He throws a couple scones onto a plate and places that on the tray too. “That’s interesting. What about any friends?”

Techno shrugs. “Don’t have time for friends. Too much school.”

“Any roommates? Pets?”

Techno laughs awkwardly. “I’m very alone, if that’s what you’re trying to suss out. Can’t complain about living alone, though. I had roommates first year and we ended up having to call the police because—“

“Completely alone! Isolated from all meaningful human connections,” Phil cuts him off. “How incredibly sad. I’m so very sorry for you.”

Perhaps Phil’s concern would have been a bit more believable had he not been grinning from ear to ear. His hands quite literally tremble with excitement as he walks over and places the tray between them, rattling the lid of the flowery teapot with every step. “How long would it take for someone to notice you were missing?” He pours a cup of strikingly dark tea and hands it to Techno. Techno doesn’t exactly want tea, but he can’t exactly refuse, so he takes it anyway. “Hypothetically, of course.”

Techno takes a sniff of the tea. It smells strange. He takes a sip. It tastes of bitter almonds. He subtly spits the mouthful he’d taken back into the cup. *Not going to drink any more of that, I think.*

“Like the tea?” Phil is looking at him with wide, shining eyes.

Techno nods, smiling. “It’s killer, man.”

Phil’s eyes sparkle even more. “Amazing.”

“To answer your question — probably a while. I don’t really call my folks much except on holidays.” Techno shrugs again. *This is a weird icebreaker.* “And uni profs could not care less if you are alive or dead on a normal day, so I wouldn’t put my faith in any of them to come looking for me if I took a hike somewhere.”

“Perfect. Absolutely perfect.” Phil takes a scone, nodding. “Have you taken out any life insurance lately?”

Techno only laughs. Phil laughs too. They laugh for approximately fifteen seconds. It’s weird. “So, uh.” Techno crosses his ankles. “I don’t have any, like, official babysitting experiences, but I *have* successfully not killed my little cousins when I had to watch them. I am also a former child myself, so—“

Phil cuts him off again. “What is the extent of your medical knowledge?”

That question Techno prepared himself for the night before. “I can do CPR, sort of. And I’m pretty sure I could figure out the Heimlich as long as I had wifi to Google it.”

“What about—” Phil motions vaguely towards himself— “Towards yourself? Could you save yourself if you were to acquire a potentially life-threatening wound?”

*When are we going to talk about my opinions on drugs and not doing them and stuff?* Techno shrugs again. “I mean, probably not. Really depends on how life-threatening this hypothetical wound is.”

Phil looks up for a moment as if in thought. “Massive internal bleeding.”

“Yeah, no. I can’t really do shit if the blood is still *inside* me.”

“Blunt head force trauma?”

“I have ibuprofen in my backpack for headaches. That’s about it.”

“Sudden unexplainable illnesses?”

“One time I broke a fever in high school by chugging ice water until I threw up. I mean, the fever did come back worse a bit later, but I definitely broke it for a bit. It was quite the achievement.”

Phil takes a bite of his scone, spellbound. “Incredible.”

Techno nods proudly. “Survival is definitely something I’m decent at. I *have* managed to stay alive for over two decades now.”

Phil puts his plate to the side and rubs his hands together. “I’m thoroughly impressed. I think,” he says through a mouthful of crumbling scone. “It’s time for you to meet my boys. They’re absolutely wonderful. You couldn’t meet two better, brighter children anywhere in the world.” The inky feathers on his wings bristle with excitement. “If you did, I’d have those children swiftly taken care of. *Nobody* outshines my boys.”

Wiping crumbs from the corner of his mouth, Phil raises his other hand to his lips and lets out an blinding, ear-piercing whistle. Footsteps explode from upstairs. Techno turns in his chair, staring down the hall, but nobody comes in the seconds that pass. When he turns back and his eyes land once more on Phil, he notices the man once again bears a large grin. His eyes are fixed behind Techno’s head. Techno suddenly feels the burn of eyes on the back of his neck. *Oh no.*

“Boys,” Phil says happily. “Come say hi to your new babysitter.”

Several things happen at once in the next few seconds. What Techno can only describe as a inhuman screech erupts from behind him and a small figure launches itself over Techno’s chair and onto the table, kicking the tray of suspicious tea and scones across the room as it went. Phil doesn’t seem to mind this. Another figure darts around the side of his chair to Phil’s side. Techno drops his eyes to the floor, even as the one on the table whirls back around and hops right into his lap, digging its nails into his legs. He’s not entirely unsure that eye contact wouldn’t provoke them to outright physical violence.

Phil chuckles warmly. “You are too eager, Tommy. Give the man some space!”



The creature on Techno's lap leans in until their noses are touching, making it impossible for Techno to avoid eye contact. "Bitch," it whispers. Their eyes are as glassy and beady as a pair of blue marbles. When Techno closes his eyes to avoid their gaze, the creature gives him a low, unhappy chitter. Suddenly they're yanked off him, and Techno dares to crack open his eyelids just enough to see the scene ahead.

"Techno Blade," Phil says. "Say hello to my sons, Wilbur and Tommy."

Techno's eyes widen. *Holy fucking shit.* "Oh! Hello there!"

The two children that stand before him are genuinely, *genuinely* the weirdest fucking creatures Techno has ever laid eyes on. Phil, in all his overgrown-scene-kid glory, looks like a regular white barbecue dad in comparison. The taller one — whose skin is so greyish Techno fears for a moment that he's a literal corpse — strikes him as immediately familiar. Techno realizes the boy is the gargoyle he saw outside a few minutes earlier. *Oops. That's embarrassing.*

(To be frank, though, the child *is* rather ghoulish. Apart from his frightfully blue complexion, his glassy eyes are cloudy to the point of whiteness, and the wings attached to his body are more bat-like than bird-like by a long shot. He hasn't got a single feather on his entire body. Techno isn't sure what Phil had to procreate with to create such a freak of nature, but he's quite glad he doesn't have to come face-to-face with the other half of that equation. It certainly wouldn't be human.)

The smaller child, who had found his way back to Techno's armrest in the moments Techno had been trying to wrap his head around his freakish brother, looks a bit more alive and yet somehow twice as sinister — kind of like a chicken that had been put through a wash cycle and come back for revenge. "Shake his hand, Tommy," Phil says.

Techno looks the child up and down. The child narrows his beady eyes. "I'm not entirely comfortable giving my hand to him. I'm pretty sure he'll bite it," Techno replies.

"Oh, he will. But he needs the practice at trying to hold back."

Techno nods. *Fair enough.* He leans back and outstretches his hand. The child goes to bite it. He pulls it away before he can. The child looks deeply offended.

"Too slow," Wilbur sneers.

Tommy bares his teeth. They look sharp. "Shut the fuck up."

*This is a bit to take in,* Techno thinks to himself. Tommy crawls through his lap on his way to the floor, somehow managing to dig every skinny limb of his into Techno's gut as he went. His wings, which unceremoniously whack him in the face and nearly send his glasses flying, are an awkward mix of feathery and fleshy; the few feathers he does have are downy and fine, nowhere near numerous enough to keep his wings from looking like skin-coloured nubs. It makes sense — baby birds in general aren't the nicest-looking creatures on the planet — but alongside the kid's overall disheveled appearance and the murderous glint in his eyes, his wings are the cherry on top of a very unsettling sundae.

“Did you drink the tea?” Wilbur asks, giving him a thin smile.

“Oh, yeah.” Techno stares at the shattered remains of his teacup and the fizzling puddles of tea soaking into the hardwood. “It was delicious.”

Wilbur’s smile widens. “Awesome.”

“I don’t *want* a babysitter,” Tommy hisses. He clambers up onto the back of the couch his father sits on and paces back and forth on all fours, flapping his wings unhappily. “I want him to *die* .”

Wilbur stamps his foot. “Not yet!”

“Huh?” Techno says.

“Boys.” Phil waves his hand, and the boys go silent. “Lots of fun will be had in due time. Good things come to those who wait.”

Tommy growls under his breath. Wilbur bares a mouthful of piranha teeth as he turns to give Phil a proud smile. “I can wait,” he proclaims. “I’m mature.”

Tommy is incensed by his brother’s words and shoots up, wings raised defensively. “I’m mature too!” He shrieks. “I can wait!”

“I think that settles it, then.” Phil rises to his feet, wiping invisible dust off his slacks. Techno follows him. “Tomorrow night, six o’clock sharp. I’ll see you then.” He grabs Techno’s hand and shakes it vigorously. “If you have any allergies, don’t bring any sort of antihistamine or epi pen. They aren’t allowed here.”

“Good to know,” Techno replies. He’s suddenly *very* glad he doesn’t have any allergies. “So, is the 200\$-an-hour thing still valid, or—“

“Of course! And—” Phil steps back, rummages in his vest pocket, and pulls out a small fold of bills. “For your attendance. As promised.”

The five one-hundred dollar bills *look* real enough. Techno slips them into his pocket, satisfied. “I’ll see you guys tomorrow, then. Have a good night.”

“Misfortune be upon you!” Tommy cries.

“That’s how he says goodbye,” Phil cuts in with a laugh. “I’ll walk you to the door.”

When Techno gets back out to his car, jogging to keep the frigid night air from adding any more money to his hydro bill, he notices the driver side door is covered in tiny claw marks. When he looks around the car’s other side, he sees the same on his passenger side door as well. There are also several obvious child-sized handprints on his sunroof and front window. *Hm*. The car starts fine, though, and Techno triple-checks that his brakes are working before he finally drives off. *I don’t have the money to fix the paint. This car is ancient anyways.*

He's half-asleep by the time he stumbles back into his apartment and collapses, clothed, into his bed. He doesn't even turn the lights off.

Waking up the next morning is a relief, if not just the tiniest bit surprising.

The sun had only just begun to set behind the back of the manor when Techno next pulls into the familiar front loop, armed with a stomach full of absolutely nothing nutritious, four hours of sleep, and a revitalized urge to become financially stable no matter the cost. In the daylight, the manor really is quite pretty — despite the overall gaudiness of the place, the architecture is a veritable work of art, and Phil obviously takes meticulous care of the gardens out front. Techno can't help but chuckle at the mere possibility that he makes his sons do chores. Watching either child try to figure out a lawnmower is something he would *pay* to see. From a safe distance, of course.

A loud thump against his driver's side window makes Techno jump, dropping his keys to the floor of his car. He whips his head to the side, but sees nobody anywhere near him. *Maybe I imagined it.* He awkwardly twists to pick his keys up from where they'd fallen beside his gas pedal. When he straightens, Tommy is sitting on the front of his car, face pressed to his windshield. *Nope. Definitely didn't imagine it.* He waves. Tommy does nothing but thump his little fists against the glass. He's scowling, eyes blazing with murderous intent, but having his nose pulled upwards like a pug safely negates any of his potential scariness. He doesn't seem to be armed, though, so Techno tentatively unlocks the door and cracks it open. "Hey, buddy," He says.

Tommy pounces for the open space and Techno just manages to slam his door shut again without catching any of the boy's bony fingers. "Let me in!" Tommy shrieks, sliding off the hood of his car and grabbing the driver side handle in both hands. For a moment, Techno worries his vigorous rattling will tear the whole thing off. *That* he would have to pay to replace. "Let me in, you bitch!"

"No," Techno replies. "I think you're going to physically hurt me."

"I am!" Tommy switches the focus of his attack to the driver side window and punches at it mercilessly. He's just barely tall enough to see into the window itself, but Techno's windows are pretty shit to begin with, so he doesn't trust their ability to defend him from the furious humanoid child battering his vehicle as though it had just mowed his whole family down. Windows are also expensive to replace. Techno wants to *make* money, not lose it, thanks.

Something heavy crashes into the top of Techno's car hard enough to rock it sideways, lifting two wheels entirely off the ground. It falls back into place, gears shrieking, and Techno is unceremoniously jolted into his center console. A shadow looms into his sunroof. "Hello, Techno Blade!" He hears a series of quick knocks against the glass. "It's me! Phil!"

*I forgot he could fly,* Techno thinks, feeling rather jostled. "You can call me Techno!" He cries weakly.

Phil appears at his door and scoops Tommy up into his arms, seemingly unaffected by his wild thrashing. "He's excited!" He exclaims. Tommy spits a slew of curses a child his age

shouldn't even be aware of. "He's so excited to be babysat for the first time. The boys have just been bouncing off the walls!"

"I'll hurt you in ways they don't even have words for yet!" Tommy spits.

"See?" Phil steps back and lets Techno warily step out of his car. He's immaculately dressed; Techno wasn't aware his dress style could actually get *fancier*. "You're already inspiring his creativity."

Techno gives a thumbs up. His shoulder aches. "Super."

Techno sees Wilbur back in his gargoyle spot as they walk inside and gives him a small wave. The boy waves back, then melts into the shadows and disappears. All of a second later, he's opening the door, politely standing by as Phil leads Techno inside. "I should only be gone for a couple hours. I've got a date tonight."

"Dad's got a girlfriend," Wilbur explains. "She's on the computer."

"She's a robot!" Tommy screams.

"She lives overseas." Phil lets Tommy fall off his hip and the boy immediately attaches himself to Techno's arm, pawing at the hand clutched around his keys. "She's only in town tonight because of a conference, so I'm taking her out for dinner. Take it from me, Techno Blade." Phil grasps Techno's shoulder and squeezes emphatically. "The most wonderful women have the busiest schedules."

"Of course," Techno responds, like he's got any other knowledge about women at all. Tommy is still grappling desperately for his keys. "And really, just Techno is fine."

"There is food in the fridge, popsicles in the freezer — none before dinner, no matter what Tommy tries to tell you."

Tommy sinks his teeth into Techno's forearm with an angry squeak. Techno grimaces. "Ow."

"And Wilbur knows all the phone numbers of people to call if there's trouble. Emergency services are off-limits." Phil gives him a thin smile. "We don't enjoy them having a paper trail of our addresses."

Techno weakly shakes his arm to see if Tommy would let go. He doesn't. "Cool, cool. I don't like calling emergency services either, but that's just because they're expensive."

Phil chuckles. "You entertain me. I hope my boys go easy on you."

Techno lifts his arm, dragging Tommy with it. The child makes no move to detach himself. "Is this going easy on me?"

Phil cocks his head and scans them for a moment. "For Tommy?" He says. "Yes. Usually he goes straight for an artery."

"Wow. I must be special."

“For sure.”

The moment Phil turns away to put on his shoes, Wilbur grabs Techno’s free arm and tugs on it. His cloudy, lifeless eyes gleam with excitement. They remind Techno of two glasses of really shiny milk. It’s weird. “Do you want to come see my toys in my room?”

“Yeah, sure. Your brother will have to come too. He’s still biting my arm.”

“That’s fine,” Wilbur replies, but he looks bothered nonetheless. “Have fun with your ex-wife, Dad.”

Phil points a stern finger at him as he tucks his wings into the slits in the back of his trench-coat. “She’s not *actually* my ex-wife; I just call her that in restaurants to make the people sitting around us uncomfortable.” He shifts his gaze to Techno and raises his eyebrows. “Cheapest way to get a little privacy in a restaurant. Ladies love it.”

“Noted.” Techno can’t decide whether he wants to meet this woman or get a preemptive order of protection. If she’s anything like Phil, perhaps he’d do both. If he lived long enough.

Phil checks his watch. “I’ll be off now. I’d hate to be late.” He grabs Techno’s wrist and yanks it up to press a kiss to Tommy’s cheek. Tommy growls happily. “You boys be good. I’m sure you’ll have lots of fun.” He kisses Wilbur’s forehead. “I promise I’ll come say goodnight if you guys aren’t already asleep. Don’t make too much of a mess.” He moves to the door, opens it, and takes a single step out before pausing. “And Techno Blade?”

“Yeah?” Techno says. “And it’s Techno, by the way.”

Phil turns his head to stare at him with one glimmering eye. “Good luck.”

The door shuts behind him with a resounding crash. For a couple seconds, there is nothing but silence ringing between Techno’s ears. Then he feels something wet and cold drag against the skin of his forearm, and the moment shatters. Techno lifts his arm. “I actually prefer the licking to being bitten,” he whispers to Tommy, who immediately looks furious and bites down harder in reply. A ripple of satisfaction rolls down Techno’s neck. *Boom. I’m already great at this.*

The lack of chaos that plagues him over the next hour is pleasantly surprising. Wilbur leads him upstairs, Tommy (literally) dragging at their heels, and shows him around his bedroom. The bedroom has more square footage than Technoblade’s entire living room, but he’s fine with that. Not jealous at all. Wilbur makes him sit on the floor, then drags a large wooden chest into the middle of the room, from which he pulls an entire store’s worth of toy trains and train tracks, building blocks in all sizes, a rather freakish collection of nutcrackers, and a handful of half-filled sudoku books. None of the sudoku is done right, but Wilbur seems entranced by his ‘number jails’ anyway. Tommy finally releases Techno’s arm and scurries away on all fours, returning a minute or two later with a burlap sack clutched in his hands. When Wilbur looks up from his meticulous recreation of the London Jubilee Station and catches sight of Tommy’s sack, his face falls. “Not *that* thing again.”

Tommy outstretches the sack in Techno's direction, but when Techno goes to grab it, he yanks it back. "No touching," he hisses. "Just *look*."

Techno raises his hands in apology. "Okay. Let me have a peek."

Tommy's grimy face splits into a grin. He pushes the opening of the sack back between them, growing so excited when Techno leans in to look that he physically vibrates.

The sack is full of dismembered barbies and damp rocks. Techno isn't quite sure what he was expecting. "That is..." He tilts his head. "That's something."

"It's my potion," Tommy whispers proudly.

"Can I ask why the rocks are damp?"

Tommy's face tightens back into a glower. "No."

Techno shrugs. "I had to try."

Wilbur moves to his side a bit later, scribbling furiously into a notebook. He won't let Techno see what he's writing, but what snippets of his handwriting Techno can see are surprisingly neat. "Do you guys go to school anywhere?" He asks.

Wilbur nods. "Mhmm. Every day my dad's friend Niki comes and teaches us math and science and law." He points to Tommy, who is curled up on a nearby chair, looking bored. "She is a..."

Tommy perks up immediately. "Female!"

"A *felon*," Wilbur corrects primly.

Tommy sinks back into his seat, scowling. "Same thing."

"Interesting," Techno nods slowly. "I go to university. For English."

"Sounds boring," Tommy says.

"Oh, it is. And very expensive. That's why I needed a job."

"Just get Niki to teach you. She's very smart." Wilbur leans in and dramatically whispers, "She's so special that she's wanted in 196 countries."

That doesn't sound right. Techno narrows his eyes. "There are only 195 countries in the world."

"I know." Wilbur smiles.

*I don't know why I expected anything different.* Techno shrugs again. "Good on her."

Like clockwork, the trouble doesn't start until the sun sets. Techno isn't quite sure if it's more a matter of biology or simple boredom, but the moment the sky outside the tall manor

windows begins to fade from pinks to ever-deepening purples, something in the air changes. He goes from pleasantly waiting for the hours to tick by until he can go home and crash in his bed to feeling like he's just been dumped into Luigi's mansion. Or the movie *Gremlins*, if the gremlins went batshit at 8:00pm instead of midnight and didn't need to be fed.

"Techno?"

Techno turns. Tommy stands at the entrance of the hallway, holding his hands behind his back. "I want to show you something," he says with a smile.

*It begins.* "Okay," Techno replies. "Show me what you've got."

"You have to come closer." Tommy looks so excited he can scarcely keep himself in one place. "Come here. Now."

He jumps back a few steps when Techno approaches, keeping them at an equal distance. Never once so much as looking behind him, he makes Techno awkwardly trail behind him down the hall and into his bedroom, watching Techno with hungry eyes. The moment Techno crosses the threshold of the doorway, Tommy cocks his head towards his bed. "Sit. And don't look."

Tommy's bedroom is as Techno expected — extravagantly large, messy in the just-been-hit-by-a-tornado way, and a general affront to child safety laws worldwide. Avoiding the piles of scattered weapons and puddles of unidentified liquids bubbling on the floor, Techno sits down at the end of the unmade four-postered bed and closes his eyes. He hears Tommy skitter around behind him, breathing heavily through his teeth in excitement, and jump onto the other end of the bed. The plush mattress dips as he crawls closer, and soon Techno can feel the child's hot breath on the back of his neck. A finger curls around the neck of Techno's t-shirt and pulls it outwards. Techno starts. "What—" Something small and prickly lands on the junction of his neck and shoulder. "What have you just— Tommy, what's on my neck?"

Tommy is silent. Techno reaches up and his hand is smacked away. The small, prickly thing on his neck begins to *move*, and Techno realizes with a jolt that it's some sort of animal. "*Bite!*" He hears Tommy whisper. "*Bite!*"

"What?" Techno reaches up again and bats away the angry little hands that come to scratch at his own with one hand, scooping the creature off his shoulder with the other one. Tommy shrieks indignantly, but Techno pulls the creature in front of him before he can snatch it back. "Is this a tarantula?"

It most definitely is. A fuzzy, black, slightly jostled tarantula sits in Techno's palm, flicking its legs in annoyance. Grumbling, Tommy darts back around him and scoops the spider back into his hands. "It's not a tarantula," he says. "His name is Shroud. And he's *very* poisonous."

Techno narrows his eyes as he watches Tommy scurry into a corner of his room and drop the spider in a lavish enclosure. *At least they take pet care seriously here.* "I don't think tarantulas are venomous. Not super venomous, at most."

“Shroud is special,” Tommy mutters. “But you made him nervous, so now he’s all shy and shit.”

“Why were you asking him to bite me if you thought he was venomous?”

Tommy gives him a long, unblinking stare. Then he scowls, and his weird little wings twitch. “Shut up.”

*Is this what it feels like to be in the Hunger Games?* Techno raises his hands defensively. “I see. Sensitive subject.”

“Techno?”

It’s Wilbur who stands in the doorway, bearing the same unsettling smile Tommy bore minutes before. “I want to show you something.”

Techno hefts himself to his feet. *My torment continues.* “Show me the way.”

Wilbur leads him downstairs, much better at hiding his excitement than Tommy had been. Had it not been for the prior events, Techno could have genuinely believed that he’d simply wanted to show him a drawing or a dead bird or something else normal. But his antenna is up, his suspicions are raised, and Tommy is clinging to his sleeve, seething with what could only be jealousy. All bad signs, but Techno is nothing if not awkward, and he can’t figure out a way to politely say no in the time it takes them to make it to the living room. There’s a circle in chalk drawn on the floor with the words ‘*TECHO STAND HEER*’ scribbled underneath. There’s even an *X* drawn in the circle too, as if it wasn’t obvious. But Techno appreciates the dedication to clarity. It’s more than his professors do. “Stand there,” Wilbur orders. “I’ve got a surprise for you.”

“Yippee.” Techno does as he’s told; anything to not risk that paycheck at the end of the day. “What’s the surprise?”

Wilbur scoffs. “I can’t tell you. That would ruin it. Close your eyes.”

“Doing that a lot today.” Techno closed his eyes, pressing his palms over them for good measure. “If it’s another spider, Tommy did it first.”

Wilbur’s voice comes from across the room, strained as though he’s tugging on something heavy. “It isn’t.”

“Interesting. Is it harmful to me?”

Wilbur doesn’t answer. That’s enough of an answer.

A troubled grunt from Tommy makes him crack open an eye just enough to peek through his fingertips. He’s standing on a chair in the kitchen, reaching into a shelf just tall enough to make him have to stretch up onto his tiptoes. His balance looks precarious, but his drive to reach whatever sweet treat lies in the depths of that shelf? Dangerously fierce. *Child with concussion equals threat to paycheck. Medical bills aren’t cheap.* Techno moves before thinking. “Tommy,” he says. “Let me help—“



*BOOM.* Something crashes down behind him, so loud that the splintering noise echoes. Techno whirls around, stumbling back to avoid the cloud of dust that blooms in front of his eyes. When the dust clears, there's a gaping hole in the wooden floor where he'd just been standing, with the top half of an anvil poking out of the shattered floorboards. "Damn it!" Wilbur shrieks, white eyes blazing. "You weren't supposed to move!"

"Is your dad going to make me pay to replace the floor?" Techno asks, bewildered. Getting an anvil to the top of the head would have definitely taken him out of commission for midterm season. That would have fucking *sucked*.

"Argh!" Wilbur slams himself into the wall and slides down, moaning as though he'd just been shot. "You're such an idiot. That was my only anvil."

"Your birthday is in a few months," Tommy yells from the kitchen. "Just get a new one."

"The anvil in the floor isn't broken," Techno interjects. "Just reuse the one you—"

Wilbur raises a bony, bluish hand. "Silence. I've heard enough from you for right now."

Techno closes his mouth. *Alright, then. Maybe there's some anvil usage code I'm not aware of. Wouldn't be surprising.*

Wilbur sulks for the next ten minutes, aptly refusing to make eye contact with Techno despite the fact that they're sitting on the same couch. Techno mitigates the awkward silence by texting on his phone. Like the cool kids do.

### **SKEPPY (Classmate)**

*wat did u get on the midterm*

*Havent done a midterm yet*

*wat class do i share with u again lol*

*ENG3011*

*oh lol sorry*

*please go to bed skeppy*

*no*

"Wilbur," he hears Tommy whisper. "Will, come here."

"No," Wilbur replies. "I'm sulking."

"Come *here*, stupid bitch. I need your help."

"No!"

“Only little bitches sulk!”

Wilbur throws himself to his feet with an angry growl and Tommy disappears back around the corner, giggling. Throwing one last dirty look over his shoulder, Wilbur follows after him, leaving Techno alone. The hole in the floor is still releasing dust into the air. It’s a bit worrying. Techno hopes it didn’t hit some sort of pipe.

“Techno?” Tommy calls. “Can you come here?”

*Third time’s a charm.* Techno slides his phone back into his pocket and stands up, stretching his arms above his head. “Coming!”

He doesn’t make it far into the foyer before a weight crashes down onto his back, throwing their hands over his eyes. Techno falls with a yelp. “Go!” Comes Tommy’s squeaky voice, rife with malicious excitement. A rope swings around Techno’s midsection and tightens, locking his hands to his sides. He falls with all the majesty of a horse blasted on ketamine, and who he thinks is Wilbur sits down on his back and uses the rest of the scratchy rope to further tie Techno’s hands behind him. A little face moves into his vision, grinning madly. “Hello, Techno Blade!” Tommy sings. “It seems you’ve fallen for my trap!”

“I’ll never recover from these bruised knees,” Techno mumbles into the floor.

“You won’t have to! Because I’m going to kill you.” Tommy brandishes an impressive — and real — knife from behind his back and waves it in front of Techno’s face. *Oh fuck. Actual fuck. Actual fucking knife.* “I’m going to put this knife right into your—“

“You said *I* could do it!” Wilbur interjects.

Tommy looks up, eyebrows furrowing, and lets the knife drop precariously close to the end of Techno’s nose. *My literal fucking Jesus God. Holy shit.* “I never said you could *do* it! I said you could help!”

“You said I could kill him!” Wilbur’s fists come down hard squarely against Techno’s shoulder blades. *Ow*. “You said!”

“This is my trap!”

“It wouldn’t have worked without me!”

“It’s *my* trap!”

Wilbur stands, and Techno feels the ropes around his wrists loosen ever so slightly. *Survival?* Tentatively, he pulls his wrists apart. The rope begins to give. If he arches his back and lifts his stomach off the floor, it gives even easier. *Oh, fuck yeah. This is the shit I’m talking about.*

He’s careful not to alert Tommy or Wilbur, who have seemingly totally forgotten about him in face of their ferocious screaming match, of the fact that he’s not actually tied up. Inch by inch, he pulls his hands from their bonds, then shuffles them out of the rope circling his waist. Neither child even give him as much as a passing glance; they’re red-faced (or, in

Wilbur's case, purple-faced) from screaming, head-to-head like a couple of weird, feathery deer, and Tommy's feathers are so fluffed with rage that he looks like a coked-up puffball. They don't look at him as he slowly raises himself to his feet, tucking the knife into his pocket for good measure. They don't look at him as he stands there awkwardly, internally counting the seconds as they drag by. It's only when he clears his throat and claps that they whirl around to stare at him, gaping in shock as though he'd just escaped Pandora's vault. "Who wants dinner?" He tries to say confidently. Both boys just stare in reply. "I think we're all hungry. It's dinner time."

Upon a snoop of the pantry, Techno finds some boxed Mac and cheese between two suspicious boxes with the labels scratched out and deems it fit to make. He doesn't quite know where the boys ran off to, but he's not too worried. No sane creature would jeopardize being made Mac and cheese by murdering the chef. The murdering came *after* the goods were secured.

That was his biggest mistake — assuming Tommy was any sort of sane creature.

He begins to feel a presence behind him as he dumps the dry noodles into the boiling water (all of Phil's shit is cast iron. It's fancy. And weird.). He doesn't turn around, nor does he give any other indication that he knows the presence is there. It looms behind him as he stirs, then skitters around the other end of the island when he moves to the (insultingly large) fridge to grab the milk and butter. Phil keeps his bread in the fridge, like some sort of freak. He also has bagged milk, like some sort of even freakier freak. Or some sort of Canadian. *This is an affront to God*, Techno thinks with a grimace as he drops the container on the counter. *I think this unsettles me more than the anvil Wilbur nearly dropped on my skull.*

The noodles are drained after a couple minutes, then thrown back in the pot, and Techno is just mixing in the nuclear orange powder when something clatters to the floor behind him with a spectacular *THUMP*. Startled, he turns, still holding the pot in one hand. Tommy is facedown on the floor in front of him, holding a knife from the nearby knife block in his hand. After a moment of deadly silence, he pushes himself up onto his elbows, trails his eyes up Techno's body until they're staring at each other, then promptly bursts into tears. *Real* tears. Real, actual, blubbering tears. *Oh, fuck. I'd have rather been stabbed.* Techno drops the pot back on the stove and kneels in front of Tommy, quickly pulling the knife from his limp fingers. *I would rather have this in my body right now than deal with a crying child. Lord, have mercy on me. Just stab me instead next time.*

"What's the matter?" He manages to say, though Tommy only rolls onto his side and bawls even harder. For a moment, he almost looks like a normal child — a normal, human, tantruming child, with tears and snot rolling down his chin and enough redness in his cheeks to put any clown to shame — but then he goes to bite Techno's hand when he reaches to sit him up and his little wings start flapping madly, scattering his downy feathers in every direction. Techno wonders how he got in his position. *Oh, right. Money.* "Tommy, come on. What's wrong?"

"I can't—" Tommy inhales, then sobs so hard he coughs— "*Kill* you!"

"You can't kill me?" Techno repeats.

“No!” Tommy buries his face in his hands. “It’s not fair! Nothing *works* !”

“Ah.” *Things are making a little more sense now.* Techno sits back on his knees, awkwardly drumming his fingers on his knees. He notices a red patch on the apex Tommy’s chin, scraped from where he’d fallen. “Why don’t we go upstairs and bandage your chin? You scraped it.”

Tommy tips his head back and yowls like he’s been hit by a car. *Where the hell is Wilbur? Aren’t big brothers better at handling this shit than random babysitters?* Techno thinks. He motions weakly for Tommy to stand, but Tommy’s crying is so violent he’s not even sure the child can hear him anymore. His despair is both insulting and flattering, in some odd way.

Finally, Techno opts to just scoop him up under the knees and shoulders and painstakingly carry him upstairs as he thrashes and blubbers out unintelligible threats of violence. By the time they reach the bathroom, he’s gone practically still, staring up at the ceiling with a thousand-yard-stare.

“That traumatized that I’m still alive, huh?” Techno says.

Tommy nods with a snuffle. “Yeah.”

“I’ll take it as a compliment.” Techno sits him down on the ornate marble countertop and poked around the numerous cupboards until he finds a packet of bandaids. In true fashion to the rest of the Murder family’s belongings, the bandaids are emblazoned with a skull and crossbones. The dedication to the aesthetic is frankly impressive. “You’ve got a funky little bandaid now. No more crying.”

“My chin hurts,” Tommy whines. Techno tilts his head up and places the bandage over the scraped skin as gently as he can manage. His fingers’ proximity to Tommy’s teeth does not go unnoticed. “I fell on the floor.”

“Well, you can’t cry anymore over that.” Techno taps the boy’s chin, right on the bandaid. “You’ve got a poison label now. Your tears are poisonous.”

Tommy’s eyes grow wide. “They are?”

Techno nods solemnly. Then, without hesitation, Tommy drives a fist into his face and promptly begins bawling again. *Fuck. I forgot this kid was insane.* Techno steps back in shock but Tommy practically lunges for him, pressing his snot-covered face into the middle of Techno’s t-shirt. “Die!” He shrieks, trapping Techno in a demented bear hug. “Die from my poison!”

Techno can literally feel the moisture leaking through his shirt. *Oh, gross. Ew. I so would have rather been stabbed.* “I’m actually immune!” He says quickly. “I’m immune to all poisons and venoms. It’s a disease. A horrible disease.”

Tommy pulls back, looking betrayed. “You are?”

Techno nods quickly.

“Is *that* why you could drink the tea?”

*I knew there was something in that tea.* Techno laughs nervously. “Yup! You caught me!”

Tommy fists his hands in Techno’s uncomfortably moistened shirt, presses his forehead to Techno’s chest, and screams with all the grief of a wartime widow. How Wilbur hadn’t come running yet to make sure Techno wasn’t tearing his brother limb from limb or eating him alive was a genuine surprise. “I hate you!” Tommy screeches. “I hate you and I hate everyone!”

“Well, hey now.” Techno lifts him from under the armpits and sits him back down on the bathroom counter. “You can hate me, but you shouldn’t hate everyone. That’s not fair.”

“I hate Wilbur.” Tommy crosses his arms, sniffing. “He’s always better than me.”

“No he isn’t! If I remember you correctly, *both* of your murder attempts failed.”

“Wilbur’s only failed because *I* ruined it,” Tommy says tearfully. “It was my fault.”

“Oh, pssht.” Techno waves a hand nonchalantly. “That’s just what I wanted him to think. I knew what was going on anyway.”

Tommy nods, looking marginally less upset, but the tears continue to roll down his puffy cheeks with no signs of stopping. *I can’t leave him like this. Phil won’t pay me if his son looks like he’s been mentally tortured.* “Do you want a popsicle?” Techno asks hopefully. He receives a teary-eyed nod in return. *Success.* “Perfect. You stay right there, and I’ll be right back. No scheming.”

Tommy wipes his eye. “No promises.”

To Techno’s surprise, the kitchen is not empty when he sprints into it, red-faced. Wilbur sits on the edge of the island, reading, with a finished bowl of Mac and cheese at his side. “Oh,” Techno says. “You finished it.” He looks around. The rest of the dishes and mac and cheese are nowhere to be seen. “And you did the dishes.”

Wilbur shakes his head, then points out the open window over the sink. “Oh.” Techno nods understandingly. “You threw them out the window.”

Wilbur gives him a small smile and a nod of agreement. Techno is surprisingly unbothered. “No dishes anyway,” he says with a shrug. “Would you like a popsicle?”

Wilbur’s greyish face lights up in a grin. Techno bends to open up the freezer portion of the fridge (which is on the bottom, like in all the other rich people houses) and tosses him one of the wrapped popsicles from the door compartment. He opts to ignore the suspicious bags of unknown meat sitting at the bottom. Phil hasn’t invited him over for dinner yet, so he’s safe for the moment.

“Behave yourself,” Techno says, sliding the freezer door shut. “And I promise I’m not torturing your brother.”

Wilbur shrugs. "I'd just laugh if you were. And tell you 'good luck.'"

*Unsurprising.* With a final polite wave, Techno darts back upstairs. In the half minute Techno had left him alone, Tommy had managed to tear up several towels into thin shreds and cover the floor of the bathroom with them. All things considered, the damage is minor, so Techno doesn't mention it. "I got you a popsicle!" He says. Tommy spits out a half-chewed section of towel and grasps for it desperately. Techno is barely able to take off the packaging before the child rips it straight from his hands. Honestly, it wouldn't surprise him if the boys ate the packaging too. It seems on brand for the two of them. "Are you feeling better now?"

Tommy gives a weak shrug. At least he's quiet now. "Why don't we take a few deep breaths and list a few things that make us happy?" Techno says. "I learned that from the internet. It's a pretty good anti-crying technique."

"I like my dad," Tommy says with a hiccup. "And I like my spider, Shroud."

"Good, good," Techno replies. "Go on."

"I like Wilbur too, sometimes. And Niki. She's cool."

*This is surprisingly wholesome,* Techno thinks hopefully.

"And I like violence, and throwing people into lakes, and I like my dad but especially when he's murdering people."

*There it is.* Techno gives Tommy an enthusiastic thumbs up. "Detailed. I like it."

Tommy gives a great sniffle, takes a large bite of his popsicle, then beckons Techno nearer. When Techno gets within arm's reach, he grabs a handful of Techno's shirt and blows his nose with it. "Mm." Techno sighs. "I mean, it was grossly moist already."

"I feel better now," Tommy says. He finishes the popsicle in two bites, then flicks the stick into the nearby garbage. "I'm tired."

"Do you want to go to bed?" Techno asks.

Tommy scrubs at his eyes. "Mmhmm."

"Alright." *Thank God and his bread.* "You have to brush your teeth first."

Tommy's face sours. "I hate brushing my teeth. I won't do it."

Techno has to think for a moment. "If you brush your teeth, I'll lay on the floor of your bedroom really still and pretend I'm dead."

Tommy's toothpaste is strawberry-flavoured. Techno thinks the watermelon is better, but he keeps his mouth shut. That's a debate for a different night.

"Don't worry about Wilbur," Tommy murmurs as Techno is tucking him in. The breast pocket of his little pyjama set has a *T* embroidered on it. It's kind of adorable. "He doesn't

need to be tucked in. He puts himself to bed because he's old."

"Roger that," Techno replies. "I put myself to bed too. Mostly because I live alone."

"That sounds depressing."

Techno shrugs. "It's life. I have a weighted blanket tho. That thing rocks."

"I have rocks." Tommy points to his burlap sack hunched over in the corner. "They're damp."

"I'm aware of your damp rocks. They're... very damp."

Tommy looks pleased. That must have been a compliment. "Go pretend to be dead," he says, shuffling farther under his plush covers. He pulls a surprisingly normal-looking cow plush from under his pillow and curls onto his side, cradling it under his chin. "Turn off the lamp and go be dead."

"Your wish is my command." Techno flicks the beside lamp off. Then he flicks it on again. "Your eyes glow in the dark."

"Like a cat's," Tommy whispers proudly.

"You are *genuinely* so fucking scary." Techno flicks the lamp off again. "I'm not even surprised."

Tommy only giggles.

The floor of Tommy's room is surprisingly comfortable, as it turns out. After approximately two and a half minutes of laying face-down in the darkness, Techno's sleep deprivation grabs him by the throat and promptly knocks him out. An inordinate amount of time later, he's pulled from oblivion by the feeling of a door bumping against his outstretched ankle. "Wilbur?" He mumbles sleepily, twisting his head to the side. The figure in the doorway, lit up from behind by the hallway lights like a shadowy angel from his nightmares, is far too large to be Wilbur.

It's Phil.

*Oh, fuck. I'm so fucked.* Techno jumps to his feet fast enough to make his head spin. "Phil!" He says, far too loud. "Phil!" He repeats at a whisper. "Good to see you!"

Phil smells of wine and garlic and a little bit of women's perfume, and his eyes are wide and curious as they look him up and down. "I'm glad to see you too! I assumed the worst when you didn't answer the door. May I ask why you are on Tommy's floor?"

"Ah, yeah. Sorry," Techno says as he wipes his pants. "I was pretending to be dead."

Phil cocks his head. "Why?"

Techno points back at Tommy, sound asleep in his nest of blankets and pillows, and Phil's face lights up. "How did you know that helps him sleep?" He says, impressed.

“Intuition.” Techno shrugs nonchalantly.

“You’re incredible. Wilbur was just telling me how much fun you all had when I went to kiss him goodnight. I see the anvil was put to good use.” Phil elbows him playfully. “Will likes to wait for special occasions to bring *that* one out.”

“Yeah. Super special.” Techno smiles. “Lots of fun.”

“Come. Let’s let him sleep.” Phil takes him by the arm and excitedly pushes him out into the hallway, then slips back into the darkened room to murmur something unintelligible and press a kiss to Tommy’s forehead. He’s beaming as he darts out and closes the door behind the two of them. “Out like a light. I’m surprised. Did he hit his head at all today?”

“Not... Not that I *saw*,” Techno replies unsurely.

“Wow. You, Techno Blade—“ he pokes Techno squarely in the chest— “Are a miracle worker. I can’t describe how impressed I am with you.”

*You walked in on me sleeping on the job! Techno thinks incredulously. A fire could have started while I was knocked out or something!*

He’s too groggy and shell-shocked to resist as Phil pulls him back downstairs, chattering at lightning speed about his date and all thirty thousand of her amazing qualities (the latest of which being her 15th time escaping grand larceny through double jeopardy. Phil practically faints as he tells the story). They end up in the foyer, and suddenly a thick envelope is being pushed into Techno’s hands. When Techno goes to open it, Phil hastily grabs his hands.

“Nuh-uh,” he laughs nervously. “Not here. Not inside.”

Techno looks at the envelope, then at Phil again. “There’s anthrax in here, isn’t there?”

Phil grins. “I don’t use brand names.”

Techno nods. “Cool. Understood.” He slips the envelope into his back pocket. “Thanks for having me over.”

“Thank you for doing an amazing job! I’m surprised you’re still in one piece.” Phil looks him up and down, laughing in amazement. “ Really, *really* surprised.”

Techno taps his temple. “Hey, man. Up here, I’m shattered.”

Phil claps and barks a hearty laugh. “ *That’s* the spirit. I almost don’t want to let you go home, you’re making me laugh so much. Kristin would just love you.”

*I am not ready to meet the female version of Phil yet. I will need three months of energy and two therapy drinks. Wait. Fuck. I need to go to bed.* Techno takes a step towards the door.

“I’d love to meet her at some point, but I’ve got class tomorrow. If you want me to babysit again, you’ve got my email.”

“Yes!” Phil’s eyes gleam. “I do, I do. I can find you. Goodnight, Techno Blade! I’m sure the boys just loved having you here.”



“You can tell them I enjoyed myself too,” Techno replies politely. “And really, it’s just Techno.”

“Have a safe drive home! Be sure to watch out for roadkill.” Phil smiles. “Sometimes I get bored on my way home.”

*And that’s my cue to leave.* Techno grabs one of the door handles and swings it open, letting the cold night air wash away some of his foggiess. *I am so surprised I am alive right now.* “Will do! Good night!”

He doesn’t see any roadkill on his way home, thankfully, but that doesn’t make him any more confident that Phil was joking. The thick envelope remains in his back pocket; Techno keeps his windows open for good measure. He doesn’t even turn on any music. Something about it feels improper.

The first thing he does upon stumbling back into his apartment is grab plastic gloves and the gas mask under his sink (second year was a tough year for him. Don’t ask.) and walk out onto his little balcony with Phil’s envelope. He opens it, briefly counts the bills (a whole two thousand dollars, which is *double* what he was expecting!), and then delicately places the envelope between two of his house plants to keep it from blowing away in the wind. Once he’s satisfied and basking in the glow of his newfound wealth, he hurries back inside and manages to change out of his aptly moistened clothes before crashing. That’s his final win of the night — that and simply surviving. He sleeps victoriously.

When he wakes up, every single house plant on his balcony is blackened and dead. The bills are still there, though, and sniffing them doesn’t immediately fry what remains of Techno’s braincells, so he considers them safe. As he walks back inside, flipping the wad of bills between his fingers, his half-dead phone buzzes. It’s a text.

*Hello, Techno Blade! 😏 It is Phil Murder (babysitting 😊).*

Techno reads it over three times. Then he squints, scoffs, and reads it three more.

*How the fuck did this dude get my number?*

## Chapter End Notes

welcome back, clowns

i am SO EXCITED to show you TEABG! this has been in the works for a couple weeks now. no better day to post it than on Phil and Kristin’s anniversary!! Second and third chapters shouldn’t take too long. I have so many... ideas ;)

if this gets 1000 kudos i will consider writing a spinoff.....

edit: all your comments are making me weep lmao /pos! this is my first attempt at comedy and i am so glad you all are being so kind. i think chapters 2 and 3 are gonna be amazing. ill release the names of the potential spin-offs when i post chap 2, just to entice some kudos.... hee hee hee

# Technoblade Unwillingly Acquires A Roommate

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Three weeks pass with relative ease. Phil (who never explains how he got Techno's number) texts him twice a week with a date and a time, and Techno always ends up walking home with several thousand dollars in his pocket, no matter how long the shift itself was. By the end of the third week, Phil's even stopped putting anthrax in the envelopes. The people at the bank definitely think he's got some sort of drug lab in his basement, if the wide-eyed stares they give him as he gives them another stack of bills to be put into his bank account are anything to go off of. Techno doesn't mind — the only drug they'd find on him is, unsurprisingly, the anthrax, and even that would be in trace amounts only. Turns out it doesn't come out of denim as easy as expected. Several pairs of pants had unfortunately been no match for Techno's new work conditions.

Midterm season is as awful as it always is, but not being poor does significantly lessen the blow. Techno actually eats a vegetable or two over the course of the weeks, and by the time he's finished his fourth and final midterm, he practically feels like Adonis. Somewhat. His grades could still definitely glow up a little, but he's happy to consider them a work in progress.

Balancing his coffee cup and a plastic tray of pasta salad in one hand, Techno slumps down into the cushioned cafe seat and rolls his backpack off his shoulder. Tuesdays were his 'Techno-Treats-Himself' days, as he'd taken to calling them, and the little cafe on campus was a good place to get a cheap meal and a decent cup of coffee he could load with free creamer and sugar to his overworked heart's content. He pulls his phone from his pocket and places it on the small table, then bends over to pull his laptop from his backpack to do a bit of work. After midterm season, after all, came the equally stressful final project season, and Techno had had enough experience in group projects to know to get his part done ahead of time. But when he straightens and goes to put his shitty little laptop on the table, someone is sitting at the seat across from him, eating his pasta salad, staring at him as though he were a criminal in disguise.

"Skeppy?" Techno says.

Skeppy points the fork at him accusingly. "Who are you and what have you done with Techno?"

"What?" Techno reaches for his pasta salad but Skeppy yanks it back, scowling. "Skeppy, give me my pasta salad. That shit was eight whole dollars."

"Not until I know who you are and what you have done with my friend!" Skeppy replies sharply.

Techno raises an eyebrow. "We're friends?"

“I don’t— *hey* .” Skeppy looks momentarily offended. “Now you’re definitely not getting your stupid pasta salad back.”

He leans back in his chair, pulling the plastic tray into his lap, and Techno grabs his coffee cup to take a defeated sip. It’s over-sugared, more creamer than coffee — just how he likes it. “You still haven’t explained why you think I’m not me.”

Skeppy motions at the pasta salad in his lap. “This!”

“My pasta salad?” Techno looks at it for a second. “I mean yeah , the feta is new, but I didn’t think trying new foods was *that* out of character for me.”

“You’re eating campus food. Campus food you *bought* .” Skeppy rolls his eyes, as though Techno had missed an obvious joke. “The Techno *I* know would rather wipe his ass with sandpaper that was on fire than pay for campus food.”

“Oh.” Techno lets out a small laugh. “Yeah, dude. I got a job. The pay’s insane.”

“Insane enough for you to buy campus food? What, did you start an Onlyfans?” Skeppy takes a bite of feta. “Or a meth lab?”

Techno shakes his head. “I babysit for some rich weirdo a couple times a week. His kids are a little tough to handle, so he pays me a shit ton to deal with them. It’s great — I think they actually *like* me now.”

He purposefully leaves out the part where they’d tried to murder him. He doesn’t think it’s important. Their efforts had become all but mere courtesy, anyway. Tommy barely even used weapons anymore.

“Really?” Skeppy’s eyes widen. “Do they need another babysitter?”

“Nope. And if they did, I wouldn’t bring you anywhere near, anyway. Those guys would eat you alive.”

*Literally*, Techno’s brain adds on. *Morons are on their food pyramid.*

“I’m good with kids!” Skeppy says with a scowl. “I could take them.”

“One hour in and you’d be calling Bad to come rescue you.”

Skeppy huffs. “First of all, no I wouldn’t. Second of all, if I *did* need rescuing, I wouldn’t be calling Bad because he’s not—“

“Are we really getting into this again?” Techno slams his coffee cup down on the table, spilling some over his fingers. “Skeppy, Bad is definitely a superhero. He’s not even *trying* to hide it.”

“He’s not!” Skeppy cries. “I’m his best friend. I would know.”

“You’re also a dipshit!” Techno says. “Remember that time your dorm door wouldn’t open because you left your keys inside and he broke the door for you?”

Skeppy scoffs. “Plenty of people break doors!”

“They don’t rip them straight off their hinges with their bare hands! Especially not with the hinges still *attached* !”

“He’s got good grip strength! You’ve just got confirmation bias.”

“He *flew* in front of you.”

“He did long-distance jumping in high school and was showing me his skills!”

“He jumped like forty feet or something. That’s more than the all-time world record.”

Skeppy shrugs. “Bad’s just cool like that. I don’t know what you want to hear.”

“His name is *Bad Boy Halo* !”

“And your name is *Technoblade* !”

Techno stops, then thinks. “Okay, fine. Touché on that. But the rest of my points stand.”

“The rest of your points fall to one overarching fact — Bad would tell me if he was a superhero. He hasn’t, therefore he isn’t.” Skeppy smiles smugly. “Sorry I’m the only one smart enough to see that.”

*This guy’s so high up on the Dunning-Krueger scale that he makes flat-earthers jealous.* Techno raises his hands in mock defeat, and Skeppy takes a victorious mouthful of pasta salad. Fuck, Techno *really* wanted that pasta salad. Thieving asshole. “Whatever. The next time Bad flips a car, you come back and tell me he’s fully human.”

“Okay, that happened *once* , and the guy was yelling curse words at me because I cut him off! You *know* how Bad feels about curse words.”

“Four words: Flipped car. Bare hands.”

Skeppy rolls his eyes. “Four words: Suck my dick, dude.”

“Bad’s not going to like that language.”

“Bad’s not—“ Skeppy’s phone chirps. He picks it up, then frowns. “Oh, fuck. He just scolded me.”

Techno leans over to peek at his screen, incredulous. “Does he have a hidden microphone on you somewhere?”

“No, he can just tell. It’s like a sixth sense.”

“Or a superpower,” Techno adds helpfully.

“If it was — which it isn’t — then it’s a shit superpower.” Skeppy’s phone chirps again. His frown deepens. “Damn it. He just scolded me for that too.”

“You’re out of your mind.” Techno takes another sip of his coffee. The caffeine is glorious.

“Do you want to study after class together tomorrow?” Skeppy asks, closing the lid of the pasta salad. “I definitely bombed the midterm.”

“And you want *me* to help with that?” Techno replied with a laugh. “I mean, sure, but I can’t confirm I’ll be any help at all.”

“You’re marginally smarter than me. That’s enough.” Skeppy stands, then slips his phone into his pocket. “I’ll see you tomorrow. Bad’s here to pick me up.”

“Ask him how many kittens he’s saved from trees today.”

Skeppy flicks him off as he walks away, and Techno laughs into his coffee. He doesn’t realize until Skeppy’s out the door that he took the pasta salad with him. *That piece of shit.*

By the end of that day, he still hasn’t heard from Phil, which is frankly unusual. Techno rarely goes 24 hours without hearing from him; if he isn’t texting him a time and a date, Phil is regaling tidbits of the boys’ days, asking him questions that are a little too pointed to not be for some sort of financial scam, or giving him activity ideas for the next time he’d come over and entertain the boys. On one horrifying occasion, Techno received a text while on his way to Phil’s house that only said:

*Tommy found a dead squirrel today! Time for arts and crafts!!* 😬

Yeah, *that* had been a weird night. Thoroughly entertaining, though, and far more informative than any regular biology class.

Techno can’t exactly say he’s *complaining* that Phil isn’t texting him. A free night to himself is nothing to turn his nose up at, especially given how busy he is. Perhaps Phil was just not as busy doing... whatever it was he did to make all that money anymore. He’d never been clear on what his job was or how he’d gotten so rich, though Techno admittedly never asks too many questions. Part of him is a little worried he’d end up on some sort of list if he figured out too much. It’s best to stay ignorant. Ignorance is baller, or however that idiom goes. Techno didn’t pay attention in most of his first-year classes.

The evening bleeds into the night; Techno cooks dinner for himself (he adds a *whole* head of broccoli to his stir fry. His molecules must be hailing him like Jesus), finishes the chunk of his homework he would have gotten done at the cafe had he not been interrupted, and passes out before midnight listening to a detailed video essay critiquing a kid’s TV show he used to watch. When he wakes up hours later, it’s still playing. He checks the video length. It’s eight hours long. *Jesus Christ. Some people have too much time on their hands.*

Groaning, he reaches his arm over his head and fumbles at his bedside table until he finds his phone. The yellow light of the dawn is streaming through the slats in his dust-covered blinds, and if he hasn’t totally lost his sense of time from the caffeine addiction ravaging his brain

cells, Techno knows he's got a morning class to drag himself to. But when he opens his phone, then pauses to emotionally recover from being blinded by the full brightness of his screen, he notices an email from his teacher sitting at the top of his inbox.

*Class is cancelled today due to current circumstances, as are all other classes until further notice per the email you have received from the dean by now. Stay safe and stay indoors! The lecture slides will be posted online.*

Life really is turning up for him. Maybe it really is the vegetables.

Scrolling down, he clicks on the email from the dean, labeled **URGENT: Classes Cancelled Until Further Notice**. Spicy, he thinks. *Spill the tea, old man.*

*Due to rising tensions in our local Super community, the board has made the executive decision to halt in-person classes until further notice . Online classes will proceed as normal. Please contact your teachers for all other questions. We give our condolences to everyone affected by the recent events and hope for a quick resolution to this problem.*

Techno raises his eyebrows. Troubles in the Super community were nothing to laugh at. A quick Google search reveals a string of museum robberies that happened overnight in his general area, the culprit of which being a ghoulish, shadowy spectre nicknamed *The Black Crow*. It's a rather stupid name — *All* crows are black. That would be like calling him *The Pink Flamingo* , or *The Red Cardinal* . Or *The Evil Politician*.

But the museums that were robbed are blocks away from his apartment, and Techno is *not* about to put his own personal safety over getting his errands done. He's a busy, busy guy, and no federal crime can extend the deadlines of his final projects. The danger will just have to wait.

### **SKEPPY (pasta thief)**

*hey dude can you tell bad to hurry up and catch the big bad villain so i can go back into class thanks*

*shit the fuck up im gonna kixk ur ass*

Techno smiles. *This is going to be a good day.*

His roleplay of a functioning human being continues into the afternoon with incredible success. He walks to the noticeably empty grocery store and stocks up on groceries for the week, including a delightful little container of gnocchi that he couldn't resist taking (*potato pasta? Sign him the fuck up.*), then cracks open an energy drink and bolts through an entire project that he'd been putting off since the week before. Then he actually *cleans* his apartment, takes his sheets to the laundromat, and finally throws out the mausoleum of murdered plants that have been sitting on his balcony for the last three weeks. He wears his gas mask while he does it; he can't be too safe. Google is unreasonably scant with the details it gives him on the effects of anthrax.

By the time it's dark out, Techno's already brushed his teeth and gotten into his pyjamas. He even has a little glass of water ready on his bedside table. *Who the fuck am I? Is this improvement?* He collapses on top of his covers and grabs the dog-eared book balancing precariously on the ledge. Sun Tzu's *The Art Of War* — because's he's nothing if not on brand. Sleep knocks him out like a bat to the back of the head, like it always does when someone is being healthy. At least that's what Techno thinks happens.

A series of loud thumps drags him back into consciousness hours later. *A murderer?* Techno thinks sleepily, turning onto his other side. *Oh, well. Nowhere to run. My fate is set in stone. The horror. The torment. Woe is such a meaningful existence cut so short.*

He's just about to fade into oblivion again when something dawns on him like a bucket of ice water. *My money.* He shoots to his feet, wide awake, and grabs the first thing in reach as a makeshift weapon. It's a wire trashcan. Good enough. *My money is in danger.*

More noise comes streaming down the darkened hall. As silently as his feet will carry him, Techno creeps out of his room, peeks around the corner, and skitters into the living room with the trashcan held protectively over his head. Nothing is immediately out of place, he notices, but the window at the far end of his apartment is cracked open several inches. As his eyes adjust to the dark, the apartment remains still and silent around him. Seconds pass without a deadly attack; his shoulders begin to relax. *I probably just left my window open and heard something from outside.* Dropping the wire trashcan at his side, Techno leans forward and pulls the window shut. *That's what I get for being healthy and re-activating my survival instincts.*

He hears noise behind him and whirls around just in time to see something small scuttle across the shadows of his kitchen floor. Terror strikes him down to his marrow. *Rats. I'm not prepared for rats.* Serves him right for being so ungrateful about a potential murderer. *Pest control is way too expensive. Maybe I'll just let the rats eat me instead.*

He realizes the light switch is across the room and fights the urge to throw himself out the window he just closed. *Hospital bills are expensive.* There's no use staying frozen; if his doom is imminent, he'd rather be quick about it. Slowly, he takes a step forward. Then another one. Then another one. He hears something crawling across his kitchen counter. Another step. Another step. He's mere feet from the light switch; whatever is crawling around him in the dark has made its way to the top of Techno's refrigerator. It's crushing his bread. *This night can't get any worse.*

He really needs to learn to stop jinxing himself.

As the ends Techno's fingers brush the light switch, something leaps onto his back and sends him wildly crashing into the wall. The light flicks on, then off, then on again, then off again, until Techno's head is spinning and his senses are too drowned in terror to make sense of what's happening. Something is screaming, wailing in his ear at top volume. A pair of skinny arms wrap around Techno's throat, and a pair of skinny legs do the same to his waist. He falls with the grace of a wounded World War II soldier, bashes his nose against his dishwasher, and lays limp on the floor for several seconds, waiting for death.



It doesn't come. He does, however, feel something cold and wet on the back of his neck, so the experience is at least comparable. With one shaking hand, Techno reaches behind him and pats a small, sparsely-feathered wing. "Are you... chewing on my shirt?"

"I'm comforted by polyester," Tommy tearfully whispers back.

Techno pulls on one of the arms wrapped practically vice-like around his neck, but Tommy remains steadfastly stuck to him like a koala. Or a straightjacket. "How—" he laboriously sits up. "How do you know where I live?"

Tommy buries his face in Techno's back and hiccups. His tears are soaking into the material of Techno's old t-shirt. Gross. Those are his good pyjamas. "C'mon, kid," Techno moans, pulling on his arm a little harder. Tommy, thankfully, allows himself to be dragged around into Techno's lap, but throws his arms back around his neck the moment he's comfortably settled on Techno's knee. "Why are you breaking into my apartment in the middle of the night?"

"I hate my family!" Tommy wails. He's dressed in his pyjamas, wearing two different shoes, and there's a little backpack slung over one of his shoulders. His normally messy hair is a veritable rat's nest. "I'm living with you now. I never, ever want to go back."

*I should have been happy with the rats.* Techno laughs nervously. "You absolutely are not."

"I'm living with you now!" Tommy repeats. "I'm not going back to my house! *Ever!* You can't make me!"

He launches himself out of Techno's lap with a grunt, leaving his backpack abandoned on the floor, and skitters back on top of the refrigerator. He's definitely purposefully stepping on Technoblade's bread. "I'm not leaving!" He shrieks. "I want to live here now!"

"I'm not ready to be a parent!" Techno cries. "I suck! I'll damage you beyond repair!"

"I'm already damaged!" Tommy buries his face in his hands. "I'll *never* amount to anything and I'll *never* be as good as Wilbur. I don't even *deserve* to go back home."

Without warning, he tips forward, and Techno just barely manages to catch him in his arms before he plummets to the floor. "Whoa, dude! We do not need to turn into King Aegus. Let's take a chill pill."

"I want an *arsenic* pill," Tommy hisses.

"I only have ibuprofen."

"Good enough! My feet hurt from walking." Tommy throws a hand over his forehead. "Bring me to the couch. I'm perishing."

*Here we go.* Techno does as he's told, and because he's a good person who needs to rack up good boy points with God before his heart inevitably gives out at 30 years old, pulls his dollar store blanket off the back of the couch and drapes it over the boy's small form.

Tommy pulls it around himself and then rises up onto his knees, clutching the blanket under his chin in both hands like a cape. “My backpack!” He cries. “Give me my backpack.”

Techno takes a few steps back into the kitchen, grabs the surprisingly heavy backpack off the ground, then unzips it. There are two shirts, three pairs of socks, and a belt folded inside, along with a lumpy drawstring bag filled with what Techno can only rationally assume are the most precious of Tommy’s damp rocks, and most strikingly, a jar filled with leaves, twigs, and one frazzled-looking tarantula.

“Let Shroud free!” Tommy wails from the living room. “He’s mad at me because I put him in a jar. He doesn’t like jars. He prefers stolen ancient pottery, but I couldn’t fit any in my backpack.”

“I am not letting a tarantula loose in my apartment!” Techno says, nervously staring at the unhappy bug sitting in his hands. It seems to stare back at him, wiggling its legs reproachfully. “I will put him in a bowl, but I’m covering the top with plastic. He’s not allowed to get out.”

“He’s well-behaved!” Tommy replies.

“You tried to *kill* me with him!”

“And he *didn’t* kill you!” Tommy looks around, then points at a vase Techno has sitting on a shelf with a few flowers in it (sue him; he’s fancy). “He wants to be in that.”

Techno sighs. “I’ve got stuff in there, Tommy. It would be all wet.”

“He can smell your emotional connection and hungers for it!” Tommy throws the blanket off himself and crawls across Techno’s couch on all fours. He seizes the vase in both hands, unceremoniously dumps out the flowers and water right onto the floor, then hops back into the kitchen. “Give him to me!” He bats Techno away from the jar, scoops his spider out with surprising tenderness, then plops it into the vase with its leaves and twigs. “There,” he says, satisfied. “He won’t move now.”

Techno steps over and peers into the vase suspiciously. To his surprise, Shroud is sitting at the bottom, unmoving, looking much more contented than seconds earlier. “Fine,” he says. “But if he decides to scuttle off somewhere, I’m not being part of the search party.”

“Shroud’s too smart for that.” Tommy pushes his fingers in and wiggles them in front of Shroud’s beady eyes, cooing. Then he looks back up at Techno, blinks, and immediately collapses into his arms again. “Oh, I’m perishing again. Bring me to the couch, please. My legs can’t carry me.”

“Sure you are.” Begrudgingly, Techno tosses the whimpering child back onto the couch and sits in the dingy loveseat opposite him, arms crossed. “Now, tell me what you’re doing here and why you crawled in through my window in the middle of the night.”

“I require nourishment!” Tommy shrieks. “I can’t bear to talk until I have been fed.”

“I am not cooking for you. It’s—” Techno checks the clock on his phone. It’s minutes past two in the morning. “It’s not even three in the morning yet!” Then he freezes, and a horrible realization dawns on him. “Does Phil know you’re here?”

“Do not speak his name!” Tommy holds up one tiny, trembling hand. “I cannot even think of him.”

*I’ll take that as a no.* With the deep-seated feeling of ‘*oh fuck*’ roiling in the pit of his stomach, Techno opens Phil’s text messages. “Well, I’m just going to mention to him that you’re here so he doesn’t go—“

The phone is ripped from his hands before he can say any more and Techno looks up just in time to watch Tommy sprint across the room, tear open the window he’d come through, and lob Techno’s phone out with every ounce of strength his tiny body has. Techno blinks. “Oh.”

“There will be no notifying anyone of anything! I am living here now.” Tommy stomps back over, hits his chest with his fist, and coughs a SIM card into Techno’s hands. “Now feed me.”

Techno stares at the tiny SIM card in his hands. “That’s a thing that just happened.”

Tommy turns, teeth bared. “I said feed me!”

Techno raises his hands defensively. “Okay, jeez! Give a guy a moment to compartmentalize, why don’t you?”

He ends up heating two noodle cups in the microwave for them while Tommy looms beside, all the while feeling like there’s a gun being held to his head. It’s possibly the most tense three minutes of his life. Tommy disappears from his side and re-materializes at his dining room table the moment the microwave beeps. “Ever had a ramen cup before?” Techno asks, setting one of them before him with a fork and a spoon.

Tommy shakes his head quickly and yanks the steaming cup closer the moment it leaves Techno’s fingers. Broth spills over the side and Tommy yelps as his hands are scalded. “Slow down!” Techno scolds. “It’s hot.”

Scowling, Tommy dips the tip of his tongue into the broth and jolts back with a hiss. “You’ve poisoned this.”

“No, that’s *your* family’s thing. This is just how hot microwave food works.” Techno drops his own fork into the noodles and stirs. The smell of simulated chicken fills his nose. *Ah, fine cuisine. God had no part in making these delicious chemicals.* “Stir it for a couple minutes and tell me why you’re here.”

“I need a drink,” Tommy says petulantly.

“Drink the broth.”

“No! A *real* drink!” Tommy rises to his feet, muttering under his breath, and slips into the kitchen with his fists balled. When he returns to the table, he’s got one of Techno’s energy drinks clutched in his hands.

*No. Nope. Never. Absolutely not.* Techno reaches over the table and plucks it from the boy's hands. "Never in a thousand years."

Tommy's eyes blaze with fury. "Give me my drink!"

"I would rather go broke *and* bald than let you drink this," Techno replies sharply. "I'm not trying to get arrested for creating a biological weapon in my dining room, thank you."

"I'm not talking unless I have my drink." Tommy sits back and crosses his arms. "Give it to me or else."

"Any *or else* you threaten me with cannot be worse than what I would experience if you drank this."

"Is that a challenge?"

"No, it's a factual statement. No chance, buddy."

There is silence between them for a few long seconds, and Tommy's expression switches from enraged, to thoughtful, to confident. He reaches into his pocket and slams something down on the table between them. "Boom."

It's a one hundred-dollar bill. Silently, Techno grabs it and slides the energy drink back across the table. Tommy catches it in one hand. "Thank you."

Techno takes a bite of his noodles. "I'm nothing if not a sellout. Now talk."

Tommy's face falls slightly. He cracks open the energy drink with both hands and takes a long swig, letting out a long sigh once he finishes. Then he pats the seat next to him. "Come sit."

"I'm already sitting," Techno says, confused.

Tommy pats the chair next to him again. "Come sit," he repeats. His voice is oddly somber and gruff. "I'll explain it all."

*Have I just walked into an old Western movie?* Raising an eyebrow, Techno pushes his noodle cup across the table and scooches into the seat at Tommy's side. He feels Tommy give his back a solid pat, then rest his arm along the back of Techno's seat. He's hardly tall enough to reach, so his torso is awkwardly stretched sideways, but the quiet, pensive look on the child's face never falters. "Technoblade," he says, fixing his eyes on the opposite wall. "When you get to be my age, you start to realize things about people."

Techno turns to look at him. "I'm twice your age."

"People," Tommy continues, seemingly ignoring him. "They say one thing, but they mean something else. They lie to you, my friend." He takes another large swig of his energy drink, then burps. "They don't even care."

“Life’s rough when you’re three feet tall, man. Have some of your noodles.” Techno points at the cup cooling in front of him, and Tommy puts his energy drink down to poke at the noodles listlessly with his fork. “They’re good. They’ll make you feel better.”

“*Nothing* can make me feel better,” Tommy says mournfully. “I have no appetite. The grief, *oh*, it’s too much.” He leans forward and shoves a large mouthful of noodles into his mouth, tipping his head back to swallow without chewing like a stork eating a fish. It’s unnerving. “I’m alone in this world. I’ve been *abandoned*. Left to *rot*.”

“Something happen at home?” Techno asks. It’s hard to even imagine Phil getting into a fight with one of his children, or even doing so much as scold them. If anything, he seems to encourage the worst of their behaviours. What Tommy could have done to incur his wrath was hard to think of. *Maybe he donated to a charity. Or helped an old lady across the street without kicking her in front of a bus afterwards.*

“Oh!” Tommy snatches his energy drink and down the rest in one go, before crushing the empty can between his hands and tossing it over his shoulder. Wordlessly, he puts his hand into his pyjama breast pocket and pulls out a crumpled twenty-dollar bill. Techno slips from his seat and grabs him another drink. “Thank you, thank you.” He pats Techno’s leg as he sits back down. “I don’t know where’d I’d be without you, boy.”

“Again, I’m literally more than twice your age,” Techno says, but Tommy once again ignores him. “But yes, home. Did you get into a fight with Wilbur?”

“What is life but one big fight, Technoblade?” Tommy cracks open the second energy drink, sniffing the opening as though it was a fine wine. “We’re born, we fight, we die. Where is the mercy? Where is the end to our torment? What makes this world worth living in?”

“Money,” Techno adds helpfully.

“Money can only buy you so much. It cannot buy you respect. Or acceptance.” Tommy whips his head to the side and lets out a shuddering breath. “Or love.”

*Oh, Jesus. I’m going to have to deal with emotions again.* Perhaps he really had been murdered and simply hasn’t noticed the fact that he’s in Hell yet. That seemed like something well within the realm of possibility given the last couple weeks of his life. “Okay. Tell me more about that. The... the love stuff.”

“Are you aware of Phil Collins’s hit single, ‘*You Can’t Hurry Love*’?” Tommy sniffs. “It’s like that, except you also can’t *buy* love. And love also isn’t a game of give and take — all it does is steal from you and leave you empty and shit and it kills you.”

Techno nods slowly. “Very poetic. Can you tell me the events that led to you breaking into my house, though?”

“Don’t rush me!” Tommy throws a hand up in Techno’s face. “I can’t be hurt any more than I already have. You’re the last person I trust, Technoblade.”

“That is never a good thing. I suck.”

“Yes, yes you do.” Tommy gulps down the energy drink in one go and delicately places the empty can in Techno’s lap. “I can never talk to my dad ever again.”

*Finally, we’re getting somewhere.* “Why?” Techno asks.

Tommy lets out a loud, open-mouthed cough, wipes at his face in his elbow, then abruptly grasps Techno’s shoulder with a gnarled, shaking hand. “Caffeine me,” he whispers hoarsely.

Techno goes to pry Tommy’s hand off him, but his fingers have practically atrophied. “Are your pupils growing or did your eyes just change colour?”

Tommy swallows feverishly. His other hand brings another twenty-dollar bill up to Techno’s face. “Feine me, boy.”

*I’m definitely breaking some sort of child protection law.* Techno takes the threat for what it is and fetches two more energy drinks from his rapidly dwindling supply — one for him, one for a now vibrating Tommy. He dreads the moment he has to break the news that he’s run out. Techno places both cans on the table and Tommy grabs one with palpable desperation, fumbles with the opening for a moment, then opts to just sink his teeth into the side and suck at it like he’s draining the blood from a squirrel. It’s scary, but Techno can’t help but be impressed. “Okay, you coked-up chicken breast. Tell me why you’re here,” he says, cracking open his drink. “You’re not getting anoth—“

Tommy whirls around in his seat and spits a mouthful of cherry-flavoured heart attack into Techno’s face. He’s still staring at him when Techno manages to blink the world back into clarity, looking genuinely thrown off his feet for the first time in his life. “That’s a swear word!” He whispers. “You can’t say that!”

Techno pauses, confused. “You mean... coked-up?”

Tommy shakes his head. There’s a dark blush creeping up his cheeks. “No! The *B* -word.”

“Breasts?”

Tommy looks scandalized. “Stop saying it!”

*This kid runs through the Geneva Convention like it’s a chore list and breasts are what fucking get him?* The euphoria of his newfound discovery hits him like a goddamn train. Techno doesn’t think anything could surpass this. *I’ve died and gone to heaven. This is the best day of my life. I have leverage.* “Okay, fine. I won’t say it if you tell me why you’re here. But I won’t hesitate to pull out the big guns if you start playing funny business.”

Tommy grits his teeth and narrows his eyes into slits, but Techno can still smell his fear. “You wouldn’t dare .”

“I know *so* many synonyms. One of them starts with a ‘T’, just like your name. Don’t test me.”

Jackpot. Tommy sinks his teeth back into the can, takes another gulp, then wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. His shoulders slump. “I ran away.”

“There we go.” Techno rubs Tommy’s bony wing. It’s unexpectedly soft. “Something happen at home?”

Tommy nods. “I had a fight with my dad. He likes Wilbur better than me.”

“I find that very hard to believe. Phil sends me equally exorbitant amounts of photos of the both of you.” Techno pushes Tommy’s noodle cup into his hands. To his relief, the boy sets the ravaged energy drink can aside and spoons a mouthful of broth into his mouth. “I don’t think he *could* love one of you more than the other.”

“No,” Tommy says through a mouthful of noodles. “He does like Wilbur better. He yelled at me.”

“Why’d he yell at you?”

“Because I got mad that he wouldn’t take me out on his cool night trips. I told him that he would let Wilbur come if he asked because he likes him more than me, and that’s why he brought him back to life.” Tommy sniffles, and Techno realizes there are tears streaming down his cheeks again. “Then Dad sent me to my room, and *that* means he doesn’t love me anymore and that he wants me to die, so I had to run away.”

*The infallible logic of a deranged nine-year-old*, Techno thinks wondrously. “Well, uh — that is a pretty big leap, I won’t lie, but I’m more intrigued by the ‘bringing Wilbur back to life’ thing.”

“You haven’t noticed how fucked up and weird he looks?” Tommy takes a rather judgemental slurp of his broth, which is striking in juxtaposition with his tear-streaked face. “He’s, like, grey . What alive person is grey?”

“Hey! I definitely *did* notice, but I wasn’t going to bring it up,” Techno replies sharply.

Tommy rolls his eyes, sending another tear dribbling down his cheek. “Yeah, sure.”

“Dude, it’s obvious. I was just being polite.”

“Mmhmm.”

“I mean it! But — but yeah, back to that. Elaborate.” Techno motions vaguely. “The dead thing.”

“What’s there to elaborate on? Wilbur died, and my dad brought him back to life.”

“How, though?”

Tommy shrugs. “Illegal stuff. And math.”

“Is it rude to ask how he died?” The sour look Tommy gives him is enough of an answer. “Sorry. I had to ask.”

Tommy turns back to his noodles and rests his chin in the palm of his hand. “Dad loved Wilbur so much making a whole new son wouldn’t be worth it. The new son would *never* be as good as him.”

*Bingo. I should be a therapist.* “And you don’t think he sees you the same way?”

Tommy shakes his head, and his shoulders fall forward as though he had just lifted a massive weight off them. “I don’t think he’d bring me back if I died. I think he’d make a new me.”

“Why?” Techno says, gesturing at the boy as he wipes at his eyes. “You’re, like, the nastiest little specimen on the planet. A veritable little freak. I don’t think you could be more unnerving if you tried.”

A sort of stricken look crosses Tommy’s face as he turns to Techno, his eyes wide and glossy. “You really think so?”

Techno nods with a smile. “Yeah, dude.”

Tommy’s face twists, and he lunges forward with a strangled squeak. His arms wrap around Techno’s ribs and squeeze hard enough to stop his breath in its tracks. For such a tiny kid, he’s remarkably strong. Grunting in discomfort, Techno awkwardly hugs Tommy back as best he can, but his range of motion is limited. “You’re the best, Techno,” Tommy hiccups into his chest. “Thank you.”

*This is surprisingly genuine.* “No problem, bud.” Techno pats the top of Tommy’s head. “I’m glad you feel a little better.”

He lets the comfortable silence sit for a moment. Then he stops.

“You’re chewing on my shirt again.”

“I told you I liked polyester.”

“Moment over.” Techno maneuvers Tommy back into his seat and cringes at the cold, wet patch on his shoulder. “Now, are you going to let me go get dressed or are you going to be a little weirdo out here all alone and get me arrested somehow?”

Shrugging, Tommy toys with the half-empty energy drink can in front of him. “Depends what you could give me in return. As a reward.”

“A reward for *not* fucking up my apartment in the two minutes it’ll take me to get real pants on?”

One of Tommy’s wings twitches. “My ability to control myself is a finite resource.”

“You can have as many energy drinks as you want when I’m gone.”

“Deal.”

“You still have to pay me for them.”



“Ugh, fine. Go get your stupid pants on.” Tommy takes a prim bite of his noodles and huffs. “Nobody does a thing out of the goodness of their hearts anymore.”

“Never have, never will.” With a wave of his hand, Techno turns and walks down the hall. “Especially not when children are involved.”

There are five new empty cans on the table and another one hundred dollar bill floating in his noodle cup when Techno returns a minute later, pulling a hoodie over his head. Tommy is dumping the remainder of a sixth can into Shroud’s vase, grinning madly. “Spiders don’t like energy drinks, Tommy,” he says.

“This one does,” Tommy replies, and Techno is oddly inclined to believe him. He still takes a peek into the vase when Tommy walks away and sees Shroud crouching at the bottom, unmoving, looking about as happy as a tarantula can look. *Maybe Phil made it in whatever freakish lab he made his sons in. That certainly wouldn’t be out of character.*

“Alright.” Techno drums his hands on his thighs. “We’re going to go on a little drive.”

“No,” Tommy replies from the living room, where he’s gone back to dramatically languishing. Techno isn’t quite sure where he got a handheld paper fan from, but it does add to the whole look he’s got going on. “I slashed your tires.”

*Sweet. My insurance will get me new ones.* “We’re going on a little field trip, then. I think you and your dad just had a big old misunderstanding, and it’s best if you two talk it out.” Techno grabs his keys from the kitchen counter. “So we’re going to go find a payphone and call him.”

“No!” Tommy shoots up, eyes wide. “You said I could stay here with you!”

“I have been doing nothing but trying to get you out of here since I figured out you’d got in.”

Tommy’s lower lip wobbles. “That’s not fair!” He slumps back down on the couch, arms crossed, and scowls. “You promised.”

“I did no such thing!”

“You *promised!*” Tommy’s voice cracks, and Techno’s heart sinks into his stomach. *Oh, Jesus Christ. Lord, give me my fucking bread or whatever.* “You said I could stay!”

Techno opens his mouth to reply, then freezes. *Ah. Salvation.* “Tommy, don’t make me bring out the big guns. I don’t take too kindly to tantrums in my house.”

Tommy turns towards him, his streaming eyes narrowed into slits. “What?”

“The big guns.” Techno raises his eyebrows. “The *B-word*. ”

Tommy gasps, astonished, and hides the lower half of his face behind his little fan. “You *wouldn’t* .”

“I would, and I will. Technoblade doesn’t play around.” The absurdity of the fact that he’s asserting dominance over a fucked-up *nine-year-old* with the word ‘breast’ is not lost on Techno. If God isn’t frowning down at him, he’s at least watching in baffled fascination. “*And*, I know the names of other body parts that would blow your little mind, too.”

“Have mercy!” Tommy cries.

“If you’ve got shoes on and your caffeinated little spider back into its jar in the next minute, I’ll *think* about letting you live. If not—“ Techno hisses through gritted teeth as though he’s in pain— “There’s gonna be B-words all up in this place.”

He crosses his arms triumphantly. *Yeah, I’m never seeing the pearly gates* .

His words seem to have their intended effect, though, as Techno is pretty sure he’s never seen Tommy move that quickly. Poor Shroud doesn’t know what hit him. At least Tommy has the dignity to look bothered with him as he waits by the door, watching Techno tie his shoes with pure contempt. “I’m going to tell my dad that you made me leave your house under duress. That’s illegal.”

“I think letting a random child stay with me without informing his parents is a bit more illegal.” Techno straightens and cocks his head out the door. “Now let’s pray none of my neighbours see us in the stairwell.”

Tommy raises his fists threateningly. Considering they’re about the size of small plums, they’re not *all* that threatening, but Techno knows better than to let the aggression go unchecked. “You keep those bad boys under wraps unless I give you the secret signal.”

“The secret signal?” Tommy asks.

“The secret signal,” Techno echoes. *I didn’t think of a secret signal. Fuck.* “It’s when, uh — it’s when I say ‘I love taxes’. If I say that, then you’re allowed to go insane. But only then.”

Tommy nods eagerly. “Oh. Okay. Okay. Can you say it now?”

“Absolutely not.” Techno says one last little prayer in his mind before unlocking and opening his door. “Let’s go, devil child.”

One thing becomes glaringly clear the moment they step outside — the streets are fucking *deserted*. They aren’t usually *busy* in the early hours of the morning, yes, but there are at least a couple of cars roaming about, doing whatever it is people do at 3 in the morning. Like be driven home from an airport. Or drugs.

“Where is everyone?” Techno asks, though he’s not expecting an answer from Tommy. It would probably be a lot scarier if he knew what was going on, honestly. Thankfully, Tommy only shrugs. “Man. This end of town is usually bustling with crimes at this time of night.”

“It is?” Tommy lets out a disgruntled scoff. “And you never invited me?”

“Sorry. Your dad says your bedtime is at 9.”

“You don’t have to ask him — just come pick me up. I can get through windows super quietly.”

“Yeah. I can tell.” They walk for a bit in silence. “And absolutely not.”

He feels Tommy bite down on his hand and promptly ignores it. *I’m getting so good at this shit.*

The familiar wail of a police siren is what pierces the nightly silence next. Well, the wail of several sirens, all blending together in a chorus of terror. As they grow near, Techno grabs Tommy by the arm and pulls him into an alleyway, just far enough into the shadow of a dumpster to let the parade of screaming police cars whizz by in a flurry of blue and red. “Uh oh,” Tommy says under his breath.

“What?” Techno asks.

“My dad does not like those guys. They’re the fun police.”

“They’re *just* the police, actually. The real police.”

“Well,” Tommy says with a roll of his eyes. “They always ruin his *fun*, so he calls them the fun police. Hence the name. If that wasn’t obvious.”

“I didn’t—“ Techno sighs. “Whatever. We just need to—“

Another thought hits him — one that sends that feeling of ‘*oh, fuck*’ right to the ends of his fingers and toes. “Tommy, is there any chance your dad could be out looking for you right now?”

“No.” Moaning, Tommy buries his face in Techno’s side. “He doesn’t love me anymore.”

“Let me rephrase that. Is there any chance your dad could be wreaking havoc on innocent civilians in town right now?”

Tommy pulls back and nods. “Oh, yeah. Totally. Definitely.”

*Oh, fuck.* Techno bends down and cocks a thumb over his shoulder. “Alright. Piggyback time.”

Tommy’s face lights up, and he jumps onto Techno’s back without hesitation. “Fuck yeah! My horse is a dude!”

*Vegetables, don’t fail me now.* Looping his arms under Tommy’s knees, Techno takes off down the street in the direction of the fading sirens. They lead them deeper into the center of the city, out of Techno’s quiet residential block, and more police cars seem to bleed from around every corner with each passing minute. One pulls up alongside them, blaring its siren to get them to stop. A bushy-haired officer leans out of the driver’s side window, holding a pair of sunglasses in her hand despite the fact that it’s not even close to dawn yet.

“What are you two doing out?” She asks them. “There’s been an immediate curfew put out over the city. It’s not safe out here.”

Techno forces a smile. “Just—“ he pinches Tommy’s leg to make him stop digging his nails into his shoulder— “Just walking home, Ma’am. Almost there. Don’t have my phone on me.”

She leans forward and scans the two of them with narrowed eyes. *Just a dude and a littler dude with wings on his back and murder in his eyes*, Techno thinks nervously. He’s pretty sure he’s grimacing rather than smiling, but it’s too late to make any other expression. *Just play it cool. Play it cool, Techno.*

“Where’s your address?” The officer says. “I could give you boys a ride. It’s really best to be inside right now.”

“Techno, do you love taxes?” Tommy’s breath is hot on the back of his neck. He’s trembling like a leaf. “I *love* taxes. Do you love taxes, Technoblade? Do you?”

*This is the worst episode of Dora The Explorer I’ve ever seen.* A strangled chuckle rips free from Techno’s throat. The cop’s professionally neutral expression begins to melt into confusion. “Oh, they’re okay. They’re decent. They’re... numbers and stuff.”

“But do you love them?” Tommy presses. “You should say that you *love* them.”

“Sir?” The cop says. She looks downright concerned now. “Your brother, he’s got—“ she motions at her own mouth— “I think he’s got, uh — I think he’s drooling a little.”

Tommy’s face leans into Techno’s periphery. He’s foaming at the mouth, teeth chattering like an excited malinois. “I gave him a seltzer,” Techno says with another smile. “His stomach gets sore.”

“I *really* love taxes,” Tommy whispers.

The officer stares at them for a moment, then pulls back into her car, mouth pursed into an uncomfortable line. “Alright, then. If you boys are good to go, then I’ll be on my way.”

Techno raises a hand in a polite wave. He hopes the cop lady doesn’t notice how Tommy instinctively snaps at his fingers as they near him. She definitely does. At least he pulls them away before Tommy is able to permanently maim him in front of an officer of the law.

“Pleasure, Ma’am. We’ll be safe inside soon enough. Have a good night.”

She gives him a tight smile, rolls her window back up, and speeds off into the night. Techno waits until her car turns the corner before speaking again. “New rule. If you start poking me to say the taxes lines in front of cops, I’m saying the B-word.”

Tommy lets out an offended squeak. “That’s not fair! You can’t just make new rules.”

“Do you want to get us both arrested? There are no energy drinks in prison!”

Tommy presses his face into Techno’s shoulder with a grunt. The residual foam resting in the corners of his mouth soaks into Techno’s hoodie. He somehow still feels it. Gross. “Fine,”

Tommy says. “Stupid bitch.”

“Glad we got that figured out.” Techno hikes Tommy up on his shoulders again. “Now, back to business.”

They avoid the eyes of any more curious cops, thankfully, but that doesn’t do much to soothe Techno’s mounting anxiety. He turns a corner and stops to lean against the building, panting, then feels Tommy shift against his back. A hand appears over his shoulder, pointing ahead. “What’s that?”

Techno squints, tilting his chin up to let him see better. Several blocks ahead of them, half obscured by the other buildings, is a little gas station, complete with a spinning neon sign emblazoned with ‘*BIG MAN GAS*’ in orange lettering. It’s absolutely *flooded* with cop cars. “I think that’s our final destination.”

Tommy shivers with glee. “Awesome.”

“Just mentioning it now — if you pee on me out of excitement at any point, I’m throwing you down a sewer grate.”

“Noted.” Tommy smacks Techno’s shoulder. “Now go!”

The first thing Techno hears as they approach is a faint, furious, “... *my boy!* ” that cuts over the cacophony of sirens and screaming. *I fucking knew it.* He shimmies Tommy off his back, pulls him in front of him, and plants his hands on the boy’s shoulders. “Stay right in front of me. I’ll lead us.”

“It’s so loud!” Tommy screams. “This is amazing!”

“Yeah!” Techno lies. “So much fun! Come on!”

With Tommy as his freakish little buffer, Techno maneuvers them into the crowd of police cars, craning his neck to try and get a view of what’s within the wide circle of officers and bystanders that surrounds the gas pumps. Nobody even registers their presence. “ Tell me! ” Phil’s voice carries impressively well over the noise. “Tell me his whereabouts! Return him to me!”

A grating screech makes the crowd shriek in terror, and then a piece of unidentifiable metal whizzes over their heads. It looks to be a piece of a car. Or what was *once* a car. Tommy jolts to go chase after it, but Techno holds him firm. “Scrap metal!” Tommy whispers, making grabby hands in the object’s direction as it clatters to the ground with a bang. “I love scrap metal.”

Techno pushes him forward. “We’ll get you some after if you behave yourself. Keep going.”

“ Put the man down! ” An officer screams. “ Put him down, now! ”

“No! Not until what is rightfully mine is returned to me!” Phil cries. “I will raze this city to *ash* if it’s necessary!”

A break in the wall of cops allows Techno to poke his head through and see the cause of the chaos. It, unsurprisingly, is Phil. Though he wears a pointed steel mask in the style of a bird's face, his black wings and trademark undertaker-for-rich-mimes dress style are immediately recognizable. He stands in the middle of the crowd between two gas pumps, holding a befuddled-looking gas station employee a foot off the ground by the collar of his neon orange shirt. "*My boy !*" He bellows, and the mouthpiece of his (frankly fucking *terrifying* ) mask opens like a beak. "Where is my boy ?"

*That's my cue.* Grabbing Tommy under the armpits, Techno shoulders through the crowd and lifts him into the air. "Your boy!" He screams. "I got your boy! This is him! He's your boy!"

Phil's mask swivels to look at them, then his whole body freezes. The gas station employee falls to the ground in a heap as Phil tosses him to the side. "My boy!"

He is upon them in a burst of black feathers and metallic screeching, pulling Tommy into his arms. He's taller than Techno is used to; Techno notices he's wearing a set of steel bird feet in place of his regular dress shoes. They're horrifying, but Techno makes a mental note to beg to try them on one day. For research purposes.

"A child!" Someone exclaims from behind them. "He's got two more hostages!"

"I prefer to call them surprise guests!" Phil shifts a screaming, writhing Tommy onto one hip and yanks Techno into his chest by the arm. "Thank you! All of you are useless to me. Have a good night!"

The metal beak of his mask clicks in Techno's ear as he leans in to whisper over the roar of the horrified crowd. "Close your eyes. This is about to get windy."

Techno raises a thumbs up. "Cool."

Phil's wings unravel with a loud *whoop* , and Techno snaps his eyes shut just as he feels Phil launch himself into the air. Though only the arm around Techno's waist tethers them together, his grip is surprisingly firm. The next minute or so is what Techno can only describe as jostling. Perhaps a little nauseating, but not necessarily in a negative way. Kind of like a rollercoaster.

He still throws up a toxic mix of energy drink and ramen noodles onto the gravel the moment his feet touch the ground again.

"Ah!" A hand claps down on the center of Techno's back, sending a wave of burning pain into his nostrils. "Spectacular, Techno Blade. You've got such spunk."

"It's just Techno," he replies weakly. "Good to see you, Phil."

"Good to see *you* !" Phil replies jovially. His mask gives his voice a slight echo. "And good to see you *too* , young man!"

With his head still spinning, Techno looks up. They're at the doors of the manor, the air strikingly quiet compared to the chaos of the city. Phil, still masked, lets Tommy fall from his

hip and watches with a cocked head as Tommy launches himself back into Techno's arms, knocking them both to the ground. Techno's raw stomach does not exactly appreciate him landing ass-first against the hard gravel, but he manages to hold what's left of his dignity inside him and hides his sour groan in Tommy's shoulder. If his breath smells, Tommy doesn't comment on it. He does, though, go back to chewing on Techno's shirt. It's a bittersweet feeling.

Phil slips his bird-like mask off his face and tucks it under his arm. His face looks a tad wan in the darkness, the lines of his forehead and cheeks casting deep shadows in the streaks of light that stream from the manor's windows. He's smiling, but his eyes seem to have softened. "I see I have not earned a warm welcome yet," he says, motioning to Tommy with his chin. It's possibly the most normal Techno has ever heard him sound. "Let's go inside. Maybe that'll warm up this little crowd."

Techno nods, and Phil turns with a small smile, walking to the door and pushing it open. Techno barely has a chance to heft himself and Tommy to his feet before a small figure bolts under Phil's arm and throws himself against Techno too. Tommy lets out a screech and tries to kick his brother away but Wilbur merely wraps his arms around Tommy's leg and holds him tight, sniffing into the material of his pyjama pants. "Hey, Wilbur," Techno says. "Long time no see."

Wilbur doesn't seem capable of speaking through his tears, so Techno makes the executive decision to shuffle all three of them inside. A young woman he's never seen before waits inside the doorway, politely chatting with Phil as he slides his legs from his bird feet accoutrements. She looks freakishly normal, wearing her dark pink hair up in a ponytail and a crocheted crop top emblazoned with little strawberries tucked into jeans. When they meet eyes, she gives him a little smile.

"You're, uh—" Techno snaps his fingers and points at her— "196 countries, right?"

The girl's face lights up, and she leans forward to ruffle Wilbur's hair. "You told him about me!"

Wilbur only hiccups, but he allows her to pry him off Tommy's leg and pull him into her chest. She drums her fingers along the tops of his shoulders, chuckling softly. "I'm Niki, as you probably already know," she says. "I tutor these little monsters."

Techno nods. "I'm Techno. I babysit. Sometimes I'm the resident test dummy."

"That I know," Niki says happily. "I helped Wilbur draft out some of his plans." She gives Wilbur a little shake. "What is it you needed to work on?"

"Timing," Wilbur replies in a quivering voice.

"Timing," Niki echoes. "They're both brilliant boys, really, but their excitement gets the best of them! It's a rookie mistake."

"They *are* both brilliant boys," Phil says from behind them. He closes the door with a gentle click, locks it, and stretches his arms out towards Techno. "But there's one I think needs a bit

more of my attention presently.”

“Go away!” Tommy buries his face farther into Techno’s shoulder and squeezes his legs around Techno’s waist hard enough to make his settling stomach lurch. “I’ll kill you! I’ll rip your spine out through your nose!”

“That’s very creative, Tommy,” Phil says with a low laugh. “I’d love to see you try to pull that off.”

Techno shifts awkwardly. “Not on me, please. I like my spine where it is.”

Phil gives him a wink and a dismissive wave, which isn’t exactly comforting, then his expressions goes gentle once more. He gently tugs on Tommy’s little backpack, letting Tommy unclamp his arms from around Techno’s neck one by one and slide the straps off his shoulders. Tommy keeps his face firmly planted in the crook of Techno’s neck, hidden from view, but Techno can feel his soft, rhythmic snuffles. Phil passes the backpack to Niki, who quickly unzips it and pulls out Shroud’s jar. “He’s here!” She says. “Safe and sound.”

“I expected no less. Tommy would never let any harm come to the things he loves.” As he’s speaking, Phil motions upwards with his finger, and Niki silently slips away, probably to go put the poor tarantula back in his proper home and give him whatever the equivalent of a beer was to spiders. *Godspeed, Shroud*, Techno thinks to himself. *You sure earned that spider beer.*

Phil touches Wilbur’s shoulder and rubs it. “Wilbur, you follow her. I’m going to talk to Tommy alone for a bit.”

Wilbur’s swollen, teary eyes fill with uncertainty, and it takes a moment for him to move from the place Niki left him in. “It’s alright,” Phil continues. “I’m not letting him run away again.”

“Okay.” With one last furtive look at his brother, still stubbornly clinging to Techno’s chest like a koala, Wilbur turns and darts upstairs, his fleshy wings bouncing with every step. Techno can’t decide whether it’s easy or hard to wrap his head around the fact that he’s a reanimated corpse. He leans towards easy; the grey skin is just too weird to ignore. But it’s still odd to think about in general.

Phil steps forward and lays a hand between Tommy’s wings. Tommy jolts, growling, but he doesn’t writhe away. It’s progress. “Are you going to let Techno go, or is he going to be here while we talk too?”

“He’s my hostage,” Tommy mutters. “I’ve rigged him with a bomb that’ll explode him to little bits if you make him let me go.”

Phil turns to Techno, giving him a surprised look. “Really?”

“I — I don’t *think* he did,” Techno replies quickly. “But fuck if I know, really. It’s certainly a possibility with him.”



Phil nods. “You’re right, Techno Blade. I should consider you a Tommy expert by now.”

*I feel like that’s enough of a certification to make the secret service want to hire me. Or kill me.* “Of course, of course. And it’s just Techno.”

“Come sit, at least.” Phil takes him by the elbow and leads him through the familiar halls and into the living room, where he helps Techno lower himself and his precious biohazard cargo into the plush loveseat. The hole in the floor from Wilbur’s anvil is finally fixed, Techno notices, but another anvil is hanging from the ceiling over the exact same spot. *Let’s hope his timing skills stay sub-par until I can find a good enough helmet.*

“Well—“ Phil sits down on the arm of the couch, hands folded in his lap. “I’d like to start by thanking you again, Techno Blade. I texted you, but you didn’t answer, so I didn’t even consider that you might have had him—“

“Sorry about that. Tommy threw my phone out the window.” Techno shrugs. “And it’s no problem. Tommy came and found me, really. Not sure *how* he knows where I live, but there are worse things he could know about me.”

“I know those too,” Tommy whispers.

Techno pats his back. “You can’t prove anything.”

“This is the first time Tommy has ever run from home before. Had Shroud not been missing, I’d have thought him kidnapped.” Phil runs a hand through his sweaty hair. “Wilbur’s been sick with worry all day, too. I searched all over the city for him.”

“I heard,” Techno says. “My classes were cancelled because of the trouble in the super community.”

“Oh! Apologies for that.”

“Don’t apologize. Cancelled classes are great.” He starts, pointing a finger at Phil as the man’s expression lifts with excitement. “*Very* occasionally. Not a lot at all. Teeny bit.”

“Alright, alright.” Phil raises his hands defensively. “Just know that I’m always available if my services are needed.”

“I will keep you in mind.”

Phil smiles again. It’s hard to connect him to the frightening bird-man supervillain he’d been at the gas station, completely fearless despite the dozens of armed police officers and superheroes that surrounded him. It’s probably the lack of giant metal bird feet. It’s *definitely* the lack of giant metal bird feet. “I’m not sure what Tommy’s told you of the rest. One of you will have to refresh me.”

Tommy remains silent. Techno takes that as his cue to take over. “Well, he told me you two had a fight, and you sent him to his room. That’s why he came to me.”

“Because sending me to my room means you don’t love me anymore and that you want me to *die*,” Tommy cuts in.

“Ah — uh, yeah. There was a bit of miscommunication on that front. But he also mentioned a bit about... Wilbur.” Techno’s not quite sure how to word what he wants to say. “And the... situation surrounding his condition.”

Phil’s face goes solemn. “Yes. That. I do remember the discussion we had on that matter.”

There’s silence between the three of them for a moment. To Techno’s surprise, it’s Tommy who breaks it. He pulls his face from Techno’s shoulder and turns his head to give his father a tear-filled look. “Are you mad at me?”

Phil sighs, rising to his feet, and Tommy shrinks. But when Phil opens his arms again and reaches for him, Tommy can do nothing but throw himself into them. “Of course I’m not mad at you,” he says, cupping a hand against the back of Tommy’s head. “And even if I was, I’d never stop loving you.”

Tommy’s voice cracks when he speaks. “Ever?”

“Ever. I *made* you — how could I?”

“But— but—“ Tommy breathes in, then coughs loudly. “You love Wilbur more.”

“Absolutely not!” Phil exclaims. “I love you both in your own special ways, but they’re completely equal. I *couldn’t* love one of you more than the other.”

“But you brought Wilbur back!”

“Of course I did! I couldn’t let him go. Then neither of us would ever see him again, and that would be no fun at all.” Phil adjusts his grip on Tommy and hugs him tightly. Even his wings begin to drift inwards. “And if you needed it, I’d bring you back too.”

Techno gives him a silent thumbs up, and Phil nods knowingly in return. Tommy’s wings start to tremble. “You would?” He whimpers. “You wouldn’t make a new son?”

“No! That wouldn’t solve the problem. I’d want you and *only* you back.” Another look crosses Phil’s face. “And I never want toddlers again. That’s a feat well beyond me.”

Tommy begins wailing like he’s just been stabbed. If Techno’s eyes aren’t just playing tricks on him from sleep-deprivation, he swears he sees Phil’s eyes go misty too. It’s a little awkward to watch such an intimate moment between his employer and his lab-made, half-human freak of a son, but there’s a part of him that can’t help but feel warm. Sue him; it’s cute, in the same way penguins regurgitating food for their young is cute. Techno is a little glad that doesn’t seem to be in this family’s realm of bird-like behaviours, though. Just a little.

“I think it’s bedtime,” Phil finally says. “Wilbur will probably be wanting a sleepover after the fright you gave him. I’ll handle getting Techno back home. There will be no more secret adventures for you, young man.”

“Can I still go to Techno’s sometimes?” Tommy snuffles.

“Whenever you want,” Techno says with a smile. *Why the fuck did I say that?* “As long as your dad knows where you are.”

Phil nods, stepping closer as Tommy twists himself to give Techno a hug. The boy’s eyes are drooping, and he seems hardly able to keep himself awake for more than a minute or two. *How the fuck is he tired? He must have had nine or ten energy drinks in the span of an hour;* Techno thinks in wonder. *Maybe it’s Mother Nature taking control to keep the Earth from being ripped off its axis.*

“Wait for me by the door,” Phil tells him. “I’ll go take the little runaway up to his room. Wilbur will want a few words with him before he passes out.”

“Gotcha,” Techno says, and he watches Tommy’s sleeping face cradled in Phil’s shoulder bounce with the beat of his steps as he turns and walks down the hall. Since he doesn’t have a coat or shoes to put on — or even a phone to help pass the time — he takes his time meandering to the familiar double doors. He finds Niki there, tapping away at a yellow smartphone. “Question,” she says as Techno approaches. “Where did you find Phil in the city?”

“Uh... a gas station, I think,” Techno replies.

Niki’s mouth stretches into an awkward grimace, but it’s tinged with amusement. “My roommate says The Black Crow came to his work today, screaming about ‘a boy’. Apparently he tossed him about a bit.” She giggles. “That’s, like, the *third* time he’s been accosted by a supervillain. I’m not sure why we all drift to him so much.”

Techno remembers the bewildered gas station employee hanging from Phil’s fist like a fish in a white guy’s Instagram post and sucks air in through his teeth. “Oof. Maybe it’s just the gas station.”

“Probably, but Jack will never stop working there. He steals a ton of candy.” Niki looks up at him, grinning. “Every time he steals me a chocolate bar, I pay off some of his tuition. Been doing it for years. I just keep telling him the payments are because his grades are so good.”

Techno scoffs. “I wish I had a friend like that.”

“That can be arranged!”

Techno turns. Phil is darting back up the hall, looking tired but cheerful nonetheless. “If you had wanted some tuition help, Techno Blade,” he says in a half-whisper. “You only had to ask.”

“Oh, I was only joking,” Techno replies. “Sort of. Kind of. If you *want* to help, like, I’m not going to stop you or anything.”

Phil claps him on the back. It hurts. Techno’s muscles are definitely going to be sore tomorrow. “I’ll see what I can do. For this, I’ll give you any amount of money you want. I’ll

rob any bank in the city if you so wish!”

“Enough to buy a new phone’s alright for tonight.” Techno rubs his shoulder. “I’m pretty sure my insurance will cover the slashed tires.”

“Done. If you need anything more, all you need to do is call. I have a lot of connections.” Phil’s eyes glimmer dangerously. “A *lot* of connections.”

Niki raises her hand. “I’m one of them!”

“Cool cool. You terrify me, by the way.” Techno points at her strawberry shirt. “Love the top.”

Niki’s eyes brighten. “Thank you! I crocheted it myself.”

*I don’t even want to know what the fuck else she does in her spare time.* Techno widens his eyes and nods. “Wow. You’re impressive.”

“YouTube tutorials! Never underestimate ‘em.” Niki snaps her fingers, then reaches for the door handle. “Still working on the boys’ winter hats, Phil. They’re adorable.”

“I’d expect nothing less!” Phil replies with a wave. “See you next time, Niki!”

*How come he gets her name right?* Techno watches Niki slip out with one last wave and waits until the door has closed behind her to speak again. “So, are you going to put bars on Tommy’s windows now?”

Phil chuckles, but he shakes his head. “No, no,” he sighs. “I’m going to make sure he’s never got a reason to run away again.”

*Wow. That’s... surprisingly good parenting,* Techno thinks.

“And bars would *never* hold Tommy back, anyway. That would just be a waste of good steel. I’d never insult my boy like that.”

The laugh that comes out of Techno is surprisingly genuine. *There it is. This family never loses their charm.* “Yeah, probably. He’s quite the crafty kid.”

“He is. Just like me.” Phil tugs on the collar of his black button up proudly. “I made him like that on purpose.”

“Well, you did well. He’s as strange and disturbing as a kid could be.”

“Oh, Techno Blade.” Phil beckons him in for a hug. It’s appropriately stifling, but his cologne is quite nice. “Thank you. Really. I can’t imagine what I’d do without you.”

Techno shrugs into his chest. “A lot of illegal things, probably.”

Phil pats his back. “You are a smart lad. Always on the mark.” He pulls back, rubbing Techno’s shoulders. “Do you need a ride home?”

“Yes, please. Tommy slashed my tires.”

“No problem! I will mention that I don’t own a car. We will be flying back.” Phil raises his eyebrows expectantly. “Sound cool?”

“Yeah. I’ll throw up again, though,” Techno says.

“That’s the spirit!” Phil grins. “I’ll make sure your classes are cancelled tomorrow too, don’t worry. It’s the least I can do for the help you’ve given me tonight.”

*For an evil dude, he can be so nice.* “That would be amazing, thank you. University sucks.”

“Pray upon its downfall! It’s great for the soul.” Phil slides on his regular black coat and motions to the door. “You first.”

Techno takes a step down the hall. “Goodbye, Wilbur and Tommy!”

“Bye!” Two varyingly sleepy voices reply from upstairs.

Satisfied, Techno grabs the door handle and pulls it open. The early morning air is cold against his face. *Yeah, I’m definitely going to puke on the way home.*

He gets a shiny new phone the next day. Phil, somehow, finds the number for that one too.

## Chapter End Notes

### WOOOOOOOOO WE’RE BACK AND READY TO ATTACK

so sorry this took so long; ive been sick and mostly brain-dead all month, and it’s my last month of uni before exams so im quite busy! I’m really happy with this chapter, though :) i know i toned down on the funny at the end here, but i wanted to explore the more human side of phil and how he parents. he may be a silly guy, but the love he has for his weird little sons is nothing but genuine. i loved writing Niki and Skeppy too! More of the TEABG extended universe will show up in the last chapter. Perhaps... some dreamy teams?

ALSO! like i promised: POTENTIAL SPINOFF TITLES! if i get 1k kudos on this story, i will write one. If i get 2k, ill write both. Vote in the comments which one y’all would want >:)

1. Technoblade’s Entirely Average Wedding Planner Gig
2. Tommy’s Incredibly Awesome Time At Grade School

no more info on those; they’re a surprise.....

thank you all for the support on chapter 1. i was so overwhelmed and overjoyed at all the lovely comments you guys left me!!! it’s incredibly motivating and humour is not

usually my thing so i was so happy to see such a warm reception. thanks guys <3  
hopefully chap 3 won't take as long!!!

# This Could Have Been Done Over Email

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Several weeks later, right in the ass crack of exam season, Techno wakes up to noises in his apartment again. *The boy*, he thinks ominously, shifting to his other side. *He's back to finish me off for beating him at Mario Kart. It's not my fault he kept getting distracted by Princess Peach's pixelated beauty.*

But as the seconds pass and Techno listens to the noises continue, trying to gauge whether he has enough energy to fight the rage of a scorned half-human grade-schooler before the sun has even risen, two things become increasingly clear:

One: the noises are not in his apartment. They're in his fucking *room*.

Two: the noises are distinctly un-tommy-like. His adversary remains unknown.

Maybe it's actually the rats this time.

"I know you're awake."

Scratch that — rats don't talk. Probably. At this point, anything is possible in Techno's cursed existence. Last week, he went to get his vitamin gummies out of his cupboard and grabbed the coffee grounds instead and then poured them all over his hand and countertop. It was fucked.

"I said I know you're awake."

*Wow, a bitchy talking rat*, Techno thinks. He still hasn't opened his eyes, simply because he doesn't want to yet. He does have the sense to wipe the drool off the corner of his mouth, though. *Who took a shit in his rat cereal this morning?*

"Get up!" The unfamiliar voice finally shrieks. "I know you're awake! Stop trying to trick me!"

Techno lets his eyes open, wincing when he realizes that someone has turned the lights on. There's a figure in a green hoodie sitting in a chair at the other end of his room, wearing a mask that kind of looks like a paper plate with a smiley face sharpied onto it. "You sleep like a fucking corpse," the masked figure says. "You just lay on your back with your hands folded over your stomach. It's weird. You're a fucking freak, you know that?"

Techno, obviously, has never seen this man before in his life. He's also only been awake for approximately forty-five seconds. His current brain power hardly rivals that of a single-cell organism.

"How the fuck did you get in here?" He blurts, dumbfounded.

The masked figure scoffs. “A window. Duh.”

“How fucking *easy* am I to follow home?”

“Don’t try and trick me into giving up my secrets!” The masked figure scoots his chair a little closer, which is rather difficult on the carpeted floor. “I know you. You’re not getting one scrap of information out of me.”

Techno realizes the chair the masked figure is sitting in is not native to his bedroom. “Did you drag one of my kitchen chairs into my room?”

The masked figure’s aggressive demeanour breaks, and he sits back with his arms crossed. “You didn’t have a spinny office chair.” He sounds almost offended. “I had a whole entrance planned.”

“Oh.” Techno nods unsurely. “Sorry about that.”

“Yeah,” The masked figure sighs. “It’s fine.”

However, it’s obviously *not* fine, since the figure then stands up and brandishes a gun from the middle pocket of his hoodie. Techno jerks up with a shriek and raises his hands. “Whoa, dude! Don’t shoot me on my bed! These sheets are, like, 1000-thread Egyptian cotton!”

“It’s not a gun-gun!” The masked figure snaps, pointing it at him. “It’s a dart gun. Now hold still.”

“That’s still going to get blood on my sheets!” Kicking his blankets off his legs, Techno practically throws himself out of bed and darts to the other end of the room. To his surprise, the masked figure scrambles back, dragging the kitchen chair with him in his free hand. Techno smiles awkwardly, gesturing to himself in what he hopes is an open, inviting, and friendly manner. “Okay, shoot me now. I’ve already lost the security deposit on this place, so the carpet is free game as far as I’m concerned.”

“Make no more sudden movements!” The masked figure shrieks. “I don’t want to have to hurt you more than is already necessary!”

“Who even are you?” Techno asks. “And why the hell are you in my room?”

The masked figure lowers the gun he’s holding and straightens his shoulders, puffing his chest a little. “I’m Dream,” he says, in a way that makes Techno think he should already know who this guy is. “And I’m this city’s saviour.”

*Oh. Oh, my god. Cringe. Ew.* Techno can’t hold back his grimace of disgust. *This dude is deranged.*

Dream notices his viscerally negative reaction and crosses his arms again. “What? What?” He says, equal parts panicked and offended. “Did I say something? What did I do?”

“You’re not *Jesus*, dude.” Techno buries his face in his hands. “I’m going to throw up. I’m sick to my stomach.”



“I am this city’s saviour!” Dream cries. “I’m this city’s best superhero!”

“There are dozens of you assholes in town! The superhero market is highly oversaturated. You’re like twitch streamers.”

Dream makes an angry little noise in the back of his throat. “Don’t ever compare me to a twitch streamer again. And the market isn’t oversaturated — the market is *me*.”

“There are enough of you to make a union !”

“That was *very* necessary and *very* beneficial for everyone involved, for your information,” Dream hisses. Then he seems to remember where he is and raises his gun again. “Not that someone like you would know anything about benefiting anyone but yourself.”

*Well, that’s rude. My selfishness is far within reason.* “What have I done?” Techno asks. “You still haven’t told me.”

Dream scoffs. “Like you don’t know.”

“I don’t!”

“Don’t play dumb with me!”

“You clearly underestimate my natural levels of stupidity!”

Dream lets out a low, cold laugh. “Oh, you’re good. You’re good. If I hadn’t seen your depravity with my own two eyes, I may have believed you.”

Oh, fuck. Techno feels a rush of embarrassment flood him. “Okay, okay,” he stammers, to Dream’s momentary satisfaction. “Listen. I was not about to let a perfectly good snow cone go to waste just because it had fallen on the ground a little bit. You can’t blame me for that.”

Dream stops. “What?”

“Those things are, like, a whole dollar. Just because it’s got a bit of gravel in it doesn’t mean it’s okay to just leave on the ground.”

“You dropped a snow cone on the ground and still ate it?”

“No! Of course not. I’d never be so clumsy and waste money like that,” Techno replies with a laugh. “It was someone else’s.”

“You ate someone *else’s* snow cone off the ground?”

“Why are you asking *me* that? You apparently caught me in action!”

“That’s—” Dream turns away for a second, pressing a hand to the flat dome of his mask as though he were rubbing his brow. “You’re disgusting. I hate you so much. That’s not what I’m fucking talking about.”

“Oh.” That means Techno just admitted his deepest shame to this dude for no good reason. *Fuck.* “Well, that’s the worst I’ve got. I’m not sure what you’re talking about.”

Dream raises his gun again. *This is going to start getting annoying if he doesn’t get on with it and shoot me soon,* Techno thinks. “The child,” Dream hisses. “I saw what you did to that child.”

“The child?” Techno feels a pit form in the bottom of his stomach. *If this has something to do with Tommy, I’m in deep shit.* “Which child?”

“The child you—” Dream whips his head away dramatically— “Oh, I can’t even say it. It’s too horrible.”

“Get on with it or just shoot me, dude!”

“The child you *sacrificed* !” Dream’s voice cracks on the last syllable. He goes quiet, obviously embarrassed, and an awkward silence stretches between them for several agonizing seconds. Techno continues to wish he would just be shot. “Sacrificed...” Dream repeats tightly. “The child you sacrificed.”

“Sacrificed?” Techno thinks back to the many make-believe roleplays Tommy forced him to play with him. “No, no. I’ve been sacrificed by a child before, but I’ve never been the sacrificer. He never let me switch roles.”

“Who?” Dream says sharply.

“The child!” Techno replies. “Unless we’re talking about different children. But really, I don’t know all that many.”

“The child you sacrificed is dead !”

“That can’t be right! I would certainly notice if any of the children I know were dead. That’s kind of a big thing.”

“Quiet! I can’t take any more of this.” The gun in Dream’s hand cocks with a click. “You disgust me. Sayonara, you piece of shit.”

*Thunk.* A dart lodges itself in the wall behind Techno, a respectable foot and a half away from him. Dream pauses. “Did I—” He drops the gun. “Did I fucking miss ?”

“It’s not that far away.” Techno takes a step closer to the dart. “Look, you just grazed me.”

“*I missed* !” Dream cries, voice rising to a devastated crescendo. “How the hell could I have missed?”

He whirls around and smacks his fist against the wall hard enough to dent the cheap drywall. “Hey!” Techno says. “Don’t break my drywall.”

“You just said you don’t have the security deposit on this place anymore!” Dream replies angrily.

“It’s about the principle. Coming in and murdering me is one thing, but coming in and punching holes in my walls all willy-nilly is another. I thought you were the best superhero in this city. Have some respect.”

Dream clenches his fists. “I do! And I am!”

“Obviously you aren’t! Your aiming skills suck!”

Dream jabs a finger at his mask. “Do you see the eyeholes on this thing? They’re so fucking small. Give me a fucking break.”

He’s so frustrated that he sounds close to tears. Techno raises his hands defensively. “Okay, I get it. Sorry.”

“I have a brand to keep up.” Dream stuffs his hand into his pants pocket, pulls out another dart, and aggressively re-loads the dart gun. He’s sniffing. “Nobody fucking gets it. If the eyeholes are too big, the mystique is ruined. Then *I* am ruined.”

“I said I was sorry, dude. Let’s take a few deep breaths, maybe. I have some wonderful anti-crying techniques you could—”

“Don’t tell me what to do!” Dream points the dart gun at Techno’s chest. “Now hold still. If I miss again, I’m killing everyone in this room and then myself.”

“I’m... the only other person in this room,” Techno mentions.

Dream shrugs. “That’s a sacrifice I’m willing to make.”

“You’re out of your mind.” The dart gun unloads; Techno feels something sharp lodge into the meat of his arm. “Ow, fuck.”

“I got it?” Dream tilts his head, then sighs in relief. “Oh, thank god. That would have been so embarrassing.”

Techno feels his muscles go lax, and the corners of his vision begin to creep in on him. He crumples to the floor, head swimming with dizziness. *Feels like I’m in second year again. God, that year fucking sucked.* As his eyesight fades, he feels Dream’s footsteps thump closer, and watches the lifeless smile of his mask slide into sight before his vision fades completely.

It’s a creepy fucking mask. Techno already hates it.

When he wakes up next, he’s tied to a chair in the center of what looks to be a strikingly barren bedroom. A single lightbulb shines down onto him from above, painfully fluorescent. There’s a blindfold over his eyes, but whoever tied it must still be buying themselves Velcro shoes, because their knotting skills leave something to be desired. Most of it has slid right down the bridge of his nose onto his lips, so it’s more of a gag than a blindfold if anything. With one shake of his head, it comes entirely loose and slips down around his neck. *This is a tie. They don’t even have real blindfolds.* Techno sniffs derisively. *Didn’t realize they were so cheap with their prisoners.*

He hears the murmur of voices approaching, near enough to tell that they're mid-argument but not enough to hear what they're actually saying. He considers pretending to still be knocked out for a moment as he sees the room's doorknob begin to turn, but he decides against it. The dude's apparently quite acquainted with Techno's sleeping patterns already, so he'll be able to tell he's awake right away. Techno also can't help but admit that he's super curious to see the face of his captor. Not for his own safety, of course — Techno's just a nosy, nosy bitch. It's because he's a Gemini.

The door opens. Techno's mouth drops open in shock. He certainly wasn't expecting to recognize his captor.

"Dream from English class?"

Dream freezes, and the energy drink he was holding falls from his fist, splattering his sweatpants and the carpet with red blotches. He turns to the other guy standing in his shadow. "I thought you said you *blindfolded* him," he whispers tightly.

"I did!" The second guy replies. Techno can't see his face all that well in the low light, but his voice isn't exactly unfamiliar either. "He must have found some way to take it off."

Dream whirls around, glaring daggers. It's definitely Dream from ENG3011 — the guy who sits a couple seats down from him during lectures. For someone who's apparently such a big-shot hero, he isn't all that significant in class. The two most noteworthy things about him are his obnoxiously loud keyboard and his dedication to audibly gagging every time someone brings coffee within ten feet of him. Techno's pretty sure the dude wears that same neon green hoodie every single day. *Wait. He didn't even change his name. Good lord, I'm a dumbass. Maybe I deserve to be kidnapped.*

"Your blindfolding sucks," he says. "It just fell off."

"Liar," Dream hisses. "You probably have, like, telekinesis or something."

Techno rolls his eyes. "If I had telekinesis, I'm pretty sure I'd know. I'd never get out of bed ever again."

"You do know. That's why you're lying about it." Dream moves to the side and allows his friend to walk into the room. "Sapnap, tie his blindfold again."

The name is immediately familiar. Techno starts. "Sapnap from Roman History?"

Sapnap gives him a little wave. He's still in his pyjamas. Techno's actually pretty sure he's still half-asleep. "Hey, Techno. How's your essay coming?"

"Don't talk to him like you're friends!" Dream admonishes him with a light slap to the shoulder. Sapnap slaps him back, scowling. "You know what he did."

"I don't know what I did, though!" Techno pulls against the ropes tying him down to the chair. Dream must have done them, because they don't budge an inch. Why he seemingly

can't tie a blindfold is a mystery. "Look, I don't know how on earth you got it into your head that I've sacrificed a child, but I can guarantee that you're wrong."

"I saw you do it!" Dream says accusatorially.

"Where?"

"At—" Dream clamps his mouth shut and shares an uncomfortable glance with Sapnap. The two seem to weigh their options for a moment, then Dream speaks again. "At the Big Man gas station."

The what? Techno has to think for a second. Then it hits him like a fist to the face. Or a tranquilizer dart to the arm, more appropriately. *Oh my god*. "You guys are thinking of Tommy, aren't you?"

"Is that his name?" Dream slaps Sapnap's arm again. "Write that down."

Sapnap yanks his phone from his pocket and starts furiously texting. "I'm telling George."

"George is definitely asleep." Dream turns to Techno. "You don't know him. He's graduated already."

"Dream likes older men," Sapnap says with a smile.

"Sapnap ." The look that Dream shoots his friend is so deadly it's probably illegal in Canada. "I will kick you out."

"You can't. I pay rent."

"You literally don't."

"My friendship is my rent."

Dream looks exhausted. "I forgot what we were talking about."

"Tommy," Techno interrupts. "You guys think I sacrificed Tommy."

"To The Black Crow!" Sapnap says emphatically. "Dream's nemesis!"

*Nemesis? This dude has officially lost it.* "Phil's never mentioned a nemesis before," Techno says. "You must have the wrong dude."

Sapnap begins furiously typing again. Dream's eyes burst with light. "So you do know him!" He replies victoriously, stalking closer. "Tell me more. You have to. I'm forcing you to."

"Not until you untie my hands." Techno pulls at his bonds again. "My shoulders are sore. I haven't done a yoga in two decades."

Sapnap looks up, eyebrow raised. "Did you just say *a* yoga?"

"Absolutely not!" Dream snaps. "You'll try to escape!"

“I don’t care about escaping! My cardio system is fucked, anyway. I just take my comfiness seriously.” Spurred on by a moment of bravery, Techno crosses one leg over the other as best he can and turns his head sideways. When Dream shuffles into his view again, he turns his head to the other side. “You’re getting nothing from me until I’m untied.”

Dream stamps his foot on the ground. “Stop being a dick!”

“You can’t make me!”

“Jesus. This dude’s hardcore,” Sapnap murmurs. “Just untie him. He’s not even armed.”

Dream whirls around and fixes his friend with an incredulous glare. “Have you learned nothing? This guy is potentially the biggest supervillain we’ve had in decades, who is so powerful he gets *other* supervillains to do his dirty work, and you want to set him loose in our house? How careless could you possibly—“

Sapnap holds his phone up. “George says to untie him.”

“Oh.” Dream stops. Then he shrugs. “Untie him, then.”

“You’re insufferable.” Sapnap gives Techno a knowing, pointed roll of his eyes (as if Techno has *any* idea what’s going on), then steps forward, pulling a pocket knife from his panda-patterned pyjama pants. “Stay still.”

*Why the fuck does he have a knife in his pyjama pants? These guys are unhinged.* Techno watches him slice through the ropes with one deft yank and feels them come loose. “Oh,” he groans, shaking out his sore shoulder blades. “Fuck you both. My shoulder’s going to hurt for the next two months because of you assholes.”

Sapnap’s face twists into a guilty pout, but all Dream does is scoff. “Okay, you’re untied now. Tell me about The Black Crow.”

“Please just call him Phil. ‘The Black Crow’ is such a stupid fucking name. All crows are black. It’s like saying ‘ATM machine’. It’s redundant.”

Dream blinks, looking rather affronted. “I made that name up.”

Techno rubs his brow with his fingers. *How the fuck did this dude make it into university?* “Just— just call him Phil. That’s his name. Blonde guy, black wings, dresses like—“

“The Monopoly man’s unstable cousin, I know,” Dream interrupts. “Tell me about the child.”

“The child is Tommy — and he isn’t a sacrifice. He’s Phil’s son.”

“The dude’s got a son?” Sapnap says incredulously.

“He’s got two!” Techno says. “Tommy’s got an older brother. They’re fun little dudes. Risk group 4 biological hazards, definitely, but they can make mean macaroni art.”

“Mmhmm.” Dream doesn’t look at all convinced. “And how do you know this family?”

“I babysit,” Techno says. “That’s literally it.”

“Liar.”

“I don’t know what you’re expecting of me, dude! I’m just the babysitter.” Techno pats his legs. “Where’s my phone? I’ll show you.”

Dream reaches into his back pocket and tosses a phone into Techno’s lap. “I already ran a data scan on it.”

A jolt of panic runs through Techno. “Did you look in my private browser history?”

“Yeah, I did. Why the fuck are you googling potato farming tips in a private browser?” Dream replies. “You’re so weird.”

Techno looks away. “Mind your own business, dude.”

“Yeah, Dream,” Sapnap adds teasingly, only to receive another death glower. “Also George really wants breakfast. Look at how many emojis he used.”

Sapnap turns his phone to let Dream see. Dream drags a slow breath in through his teeth. “We can’t leave George hungry.”

“Not after what happened last time,” Sapnap agrees sombrely.

They stand there for a moment, nodding in unison. Techno clicks his phone on; the passcode’s been removed, and his SIM card is gone. *This asshat*. He hurriedly finds his messenger app and opens his chat log with Phil. “Look,” he says, and Dream and Sapnap snap their heads towards him like a pair of startled birds. “Come here. I’ll show you.”

“I’ve seen all I need—” Dream cuts himself off with an indignant squawk as Sapnap leaves his side and darts around Techno’s chair, leaning over his shoulder to see his phone screen. “Sapnap! You’re going to get yourself killed!”

“I’m looking at evidence!” Sapnap says, but he sounds more interested than professionally inquisitive. Techno brings up the most recent photo Phil sent him — a photo of Tommy sitting on the edge of their marble bathtub, wrapped in a black towel, grinning from ear to ear. His sopping hair is plastered against his forehead. The text below reads:

*Bath time! Someone got into the roadkill* 🤪

“What the fuck did he do to that roadkill?” Sapnap whispers.

“You don’t want to know,” Techno whispers back.

“What— hey, *hey*. I want to see.” Dream reluctantly walks around the other side of Techno’s chair and cranes his neck to see the photo. “Oh, cute kid.” He stops abruptly. “What the fuck did he do to that roadkill?”

“A whole lot of things. That’s Tommy for you.”

“Jesus Christ.”

“Yeah.” Techno shrugs nonchalantly. “Trust me. Being ritually sacrificed would be like going to Disneyland to that little freak.”

“Hm.” Dream looks conflicted. Shoving his hands back into the front pocket of his hoodie, he moves towards the door, bouncing anxiously from foot to foot. “Come out. I have to make breakfast before George starts registering on the Richter scale again.”

“Huh?” Techno says.

“Do you like cereal?” Sapnap grabs him by the arm and pulls him to his feet. “We have tons of cereal. We also have cow milk and almond milk, ‘cuz Dream’s healthy like that.”

“I literally can’t remember the last time I had breakfast.” Techno lets himself be led by the arm into Dream and Sapnap’s living room, which is equally as barren as their makeshift interrogation room. He’s beginning to think they don’t have furniture at all. *Maybe it’s a superhero thing. Symbolic and shit. Because they’re so humble and stuff.* He thinks a little more on it. *Nah. I think Dream’s just worried he’ll lose Sapnap in an IKEA and never find him again.*

“Think George wants cereal?” Dream says, opening one of the cupboards. There’s a guy in there. Techno assumes that’s George. “Oh. Hi, George.”

“Hi, George,” Sapnap echoes. “Want some breakfast?”

George doesn’t answer; he looks to be busy gnawing on a paper towel roll. Hesitantly, Dream closes the cupboard. “It looks like he’s found breakfast on his own this morning.”

*Tommy would either love this guy or detonate like an atom bomb the second he makes eye contact with him.* Techno forces an awkward smile. “Breakfast sounds great.”

Dream pours them three bowls of an insultingly healthy cereal and sits them down at the marble kitchen island, making a point to sit directly across from Techno and stare him down as if he expected him to bolt at any second. Sapnap, either unaware of or used to the tension-filled air, happily chats away as he shovels mushy, unfrosted flakes into his mouth. Techno tunes him out for most of the conversation, but he does perk up a bit when Sapnap offhandedly mentions that they can’t live within twenty miles of any military base because George tends to spoof any nearby radio signals.

“Not on purpose or anything.” Sapnap takes a swig of his cereal milk. “It just happens.”

“He’s special like that,” Dream says fondly.

“Wow.” Techno isn’t quite sure how to feel about that particular piece of information. *I want to lock him and Tommy in a room together and see which one disintegrates first.* “I mean, as long as he leaves my Spotify lo-fi homework beats alone, I say he should live his truth.”



Something in the corner of his eye catches his eye. It's George, sitting in the chair next to him. Techno has no idea how he got out of the cabinet. He never even saw it open. "Good to meet you, George." He kind of feels like he's talking to a creature you'd pull out of an old well. Maybe George would curse his entire bloodline if he decided he didn't like him. "I'm Techno. Your roommates kidnapped me."

A sharp, ear-piercing ringing shoots through his head like a clap of sudden thunder; Techno's vision goes white. When he finally comes to again, he finds himself on the floor, his cereal bowl overturned and dribbling milk onto his face, with all three of his captors staring down at him with expressions of varying concern.

"Sorry :)" George says.

"How the fuck did you pronounce that out loud?" Techno whispers.

Dream scoots out of his chair. "Sorry, sorry." He grabs Techno under the armpits and hoists him to his feet. Techno feels a bit like he just got tazed. "He does that sometimes."

"Okay, I guess." Techno is far past the point of questioning things. "You should put that on your resume, George."

George gives him a polite smile, then turns to his laptop and begins busily typing away. Where George got the laptop in the three seconds Techno lay stunned upon the floor like a fainted Victorian woman, he isn't quite sure. At least Dream and Sappap seem somewhat relieved that he's got a distraction.

"So, can I go home now?" Techno asks, rubbing the sore spot on the back of his head. "I need to go sleep off this concussion."

"One: do not fucking do that," Dream replies sharply. "Two: no again. You're not leaving this house until I know what's up with you."

*Why couldn't he have just shot me?* Techno throws his hands up in despair. "I'm just the babysitter! There's nothing special about me! If you're going to execute me, please just be nice and do it now."

"I do not execute people! That's your job," Dream hisses. "You're staying here until I have vanquished The Black Crow and his two biological weapons of unknown origin—"

"His children," Techno interrupts.

"Same thing. So long as they remain uncaptured, I can't just let you go running around willy-nilly." Dream leans in closer, narrowing his eyes. "You could tell him the floor plan of my house and make it easy for him to break in."

"*You* brought me here!" Techno says hopelessly.

Dream waves a hand dismissively. "Consider yourself a hostage for the good of this city. Sappap's got the wifi password if you want it."

“It’s ‘dnfisreal’ except the ‘e’ is a three,” Sapnap adds, visibly satisfied with himself. Techno makes a point not to ask what the hell that means.

“Remind me to change that sometime,” Dream says with a scowl.

“You’re not allowed. I’ll withhold rent.”

“You don’t pay rent!”

“Not if you change that wifi password.”

Dream looks exhausted again. “What were we talking about?”

“Wait a second.” Techno stops. Dream and Sapnap give him curious looks. “What day is it?”

Sapnap shrugs. “Thursday?”

“It’s Monday,” Dream buts in. “Why?”

“I have to babysit this afternoon. Phil’s expecting me at, like, three-thirty or something. He’s going to come looking for me if I don’t show up.”

“Text him and tell him you’re sick!” Dream says.

“That won’t work. Wilbur and Tommy *love* when I’m sick. They pretend I’m dying from slow-acting poison and then pretend my NyQuil and Advil are even faster-acting poisons. Then they celebrate when I fall asleep and host a funeral around me. It’s a sweet gig.”

Sapnap laughs. “I want to meet these kids.”

“No you don’t. They’d eat you for breakfast.”

Sapnap’s eyes grow starry. “Cool.”

*At least he’s respectable in his dedication to being an idiot, Techno thinks. He and Skeppy would get along together.*

Eyebrows furrowed in thought, Dream takes Techno by the arm and drags them into the nearby living room, where he pushes him down onto the couch. “Stay there,” he orders, doing his darnedest best to look tough. The neon green hoodie really fucks with that alpha energy of his, though. “If you try to escape, I will not hesitate to use force in order to incapacitate you.”

“Can I at least get up to pee?” Techno says.

“Fine. No other reason, though.”

“What about taking a potential shit?”

“Now you’re just being rude.”

Sapnap, who's still working away at his cereal in the kitchen, raises his hand. "I'll keep an eye on him, Dream. Go relax before you pop a blood vessel somewhere."

"Fine. Thank you, Sapnap," Dream says with a nod. "I'm going to go check up on George. Scream for me if he tries any funny business."

Sapnap gives him a diligent thumbs up. The moment Dream disappears down the hall, though, he darts from his place at the island and plops down beside Techno on the couch, eyes glimmering dangerously. "You. Me. Roman history essay."

Techno sighs defeatedly. "I'd rather just be tortured."

"Your fault for being smart."

Sapnap pulls a beat-up laptop from under the couch and whacks the keyboard until it turns on. Techno says a silent prayer for his sanity. *Maybe I will try and escape.*

~

Being a hostage in a frat house full of weirdo superheroes could certainly be worse. Techno spend the rest of the morning helping Sapnap get through his Roman History essay (which he ends up writing himself, but that's fine. It's less painful than watching Sapnap do it himself, considering it took a full 20 minutes to convince him that Arceus from Pokémon was not, in fact, a Roman God), then they take a break to play Mario Kart in the early afternoon. Sapnap gets just as distracted by Princess Peach as Tommy does, so it's quite easy to wipe the floor with him. Techno considers it his little bit of self care for the day.

Dream, ever the twitchy, paranoid weirdo, drifts by every once in a while to watch them with narrowed eyes, but Techno doesn't see much of him over the next couple hours. George materializes in his peripheral view only once, and Techno is swiftly and sternly advised to not make eye contact with him. It's not like George is there for any sort of conversation, anyway — he just watches them play in silence for a couple minutes before disappearing in a blink. All in all, he's probably the *least* weird person in the household, and that's including the little tabby cat Techno catches slinking about. She doesn't actually *do* anything particularly out of the ordinary, but Techno's got his eye on her. It's always the innocent-looking ones that turn out to be trouble.

It's exactly four-thirty when the weirdness begins.

"Techno?"

Techno tears away from the staring content he was having (and winning) with the cat and twists in place. Dream is standing at the edge of the hallway, looking just as wary of him as he has all day. He's holding his phone in his hands and is rapidly typing. "Yeah?"

"When did you say you had to babysit today?"

"Oh." Techno smiles. "Three-thirty. What's the matter?"

Dream gives him a disdainful look. “Nothing. Shut up. I’ll revoke your pee privileges if you keep giving me attitude.”

Techno gives him a mock salute. “As you wish. I shall pee right on your couch.”

“Do not! I don’t want to pay for dry-cleaning a third time.” Dream reaches up and rubs at his eyes with his hand. Techno notices his phone buzzing in his other one. “Just— don’t move. Sapnap, you come with me.”

Sapnap, curled around his phone at the other end of the sofa, perks up like an excited puppy. “Oh, hell yeah. Mission time. Mission time.”

Dream gives him a very stern ‘shut-the-fuck-up’ glare, which makes him shrink sheepishly, and then the two of them disappear back down the hall. Techno’s left alone, wondering what exactly has them so nervous.

The answer to that question raps on the window approximately seventeen minutes later.

The sound is quiet at first. Techno, dozing, hardly notices it. Then it gets louder, more impatient, and within the time it takes for techno to force himself out of his slumber, it’s become the familiar *screee* of sharp nails against the glass. Techno flips around and raises himself up on his knees to look out the window behind the couch. “Tom—“ he begins, but the word dies in his throat before he can it.

It’s not Tommy. It’s Wilbur. And he looks pissed.

*Whoomp.* Wilbur leans through the window and grabs Techno’s face in both his cold, little hands. The window is closed. Wilbur is leaning *through* the glass. Techno isn’t sure what to make of that. “Skipping out on work?” Wilbur whispers threateningly, inching close until his weird white eyes are all Techno can see. “Think you’re too good to hang out with us?”

Wilbur’s fingers are digging so hard into Techno’s cheeks that it forces his lips into a duck face. “I can explain,” he mutters through it.

“I’ve seen all I need to see.” Wilbur is *still* somehow leaning through the fucking glass. These kids never stop surprising him. “Say goodbye to your little friends, Techno Blade.”

“It’s just Techno. You’re just like your dad.” The meaning of Wilbur’s words dawns on him like a truck. “What do you mean ‘say goodbye’?”

Wilbur gives him a devilish smile. It’s more than enough of an answer.

A scream from down the hall cuts through the air, followed by a series of loud, rattling thumps. It kind of sounds like Gollum being power-washed. “You aren’t alone,” Techno whispers.

A look of momentary annoyance eclipses Wilbur’s evil grin. “He followed me here.”

“How mad is he?”

Wilbur grabs him by the top of the head and twists him just in time for him to see Sapnap come flying down the hall like a dodgeball thrown by a sixth grade boy after his first Five-Hour Energy. He ricochets off the wall and rolls, coming to a halt on the kitchen floor. For a second, Techno thinks he's quite literally actually dead. Then he jolts up onto his elbows and looks up at Techno with terror-filled eyes. "A chicken!" He blurts out.

Techno nods. "Yep."

"An *angry* chicken!"

"Sounds about right."

"It threw me so easily!"

"He does pushups in front of the mirror at home," Wilbur adds. "To attract girlfriends."

Sapnap's eyes widen to the size of dinner plates. "Who the fuck are you?"

"The chicken's brother. I was frozen, then thawed, and then re-frozen. Now I'm going to give you salmonella and make you shit yourself."

Sapnap looks like he's just seen a biblical angel with a million eyes and been told to not be afraid. Spoiler alert: he's *super* fucking afraid. "I think I have a concussion."

Wilbur plants his hands on Techno's shoulders and shoves him backwards, sending them both tumbling backwards onto the floor. Sapnap scrambles to his feet, arms outstretched defensively. "Dream!" He shrieks. "Dream, there's two of them!"

"What?" Dream calls back. Techno hears him audibly struggling with something down the hall. "Don't let it run away!"

"I'm not going anywhere!" Wilbur says, rising to his feet. His fleshy wings stretch out to either side, framing him in all his frightening twelve-year-old glory. "Everyone in this house is going to feel my wrath!"

"Can't we talk this out?" Techno asks weakly.

"Talking is for weak!" Wilbur cries. "The only universal language is violence!"

*I feel like I've heard that somewhere*, Techno thinks, but he shakes the thought away. Dream comes stumbling into the living room, red-faced and panting, holding something in his outstretched arms. Unsurprisingly, it's Tommy, clawing away and biting at Dream's hands. There's foam and strips of neon green cloth dribbling from his lips. They meet eyes, and Tommy's pupils shrink to the size of pinpricks. "The traitor," he hisses.

Techno laughs nervously. "I said I could explain."

"What the hell is this creature?" Dream asks in bewilderment. "He came in through my fucking vents!"

“That’s Tommy,” Techno says. “Tommy, Dream. Dream, Tommy. So happy you guys have gotten acquainted.”

Dream looks no less confused or upset. “I think he *ate* my hoodie.”

“He does love polyester.”

“Ugh!” Tommy wrenches himself out of Dream’s grip and falls to the floor in a crumpled heap. “How can you know me so well and yet betray me so cruelly?” He pulls his wings over his head and sobs dramatically. *Feelings and emotions*, Techno thinks in despair. *Why can’t they be merciful and just kill me where I stand for once?*

“What the hell is going on?” Dream says, wiping his hands on the remains of his tattered hoodie. “Did you call them here telepathically?”

“No! I told you they’d come looking for me.” Techno goes to lay a hand on Wilbur’s shoulder, but the boy snaps at his hand. *Okay. Bad sign. They’re really mad.* “Why don’t we all sit down and clear the air—“

“I shall not converse with traitors!” Tommy hisses. He drags himself forward and reaches for Techno with one tiny, gnarled hand. “We were supposed to have so much *fun* today. I wanted to do arts and crafts with you. I found more roadkill.”

Sapnap gags emphatically, but Techno only nods, trying to look genuine. “That does sound like a lot of fun,” He says. “We’ll do all the fun things once this is all cleared up, alright?”

“No!” Tommy drops to the floor and beats his hands upon the tile as if he’s just been informed by telegram that his husband is never to return from the war. Techno has to give it to him — it’s an Oscar-winning performance. “I can never lay eyes on you ever again. Obviously I’m not as important to you as I thought I was!”

“Don’t say that!” Techno says. “I love you little weirdos. You’re both so life-threatening.”

Tommy makes an odd squeaking noise and collapses back into a heap. Even Wilbur looks a little devastated by his words. “Even now, you lie right to our faces!” The boy yells. “Have you not the slightest ounce of dignity?”

Techno can’t decide whether he’d rather throw himself out the window or wait for nature to take its course and take him out by a caffeine-induced heart attack. “Stop talking like we’re in *Little Women* and actually tell me why you’re so upset at me!”

“You skipped out on babysitting to go hang out with your friends!” Wilbur snaps back accusatorially. “You’re playing hookie!”

Tommy nods, sneering. “Yeah! You’re being a hooker!”

Techno raises a finger. “Not what that means.”

“You made Dad miss his date night with his new fiancée tonight.” Wilbur crosses his arms. “They were gonna go to a fancy restaurant and put laxatives in all the—“

“Fiancée?” Techno cuts him off. “Your Dad proposed to Kristin?”

“Oh! Yeah,” Wilbur smiles. “He didn’t tell anyone because he wanted it to be a surprise.”

“Oh, that’s so exciting! You must all be so happy.” Techno pulls his phone from his pocket and opens a note. “Does your dad like champagne?”

Tommy hacks up another ball of half-digested hoodie fabric and spits it onto the floor. “I think he’s more of a red wine kind of guy. He likes that it looks like blood.”

Techno snaps his fingers. “True. Smart kid. Pinot noir, then?”

“Do a Cabernet Sauvignon. Packs more a punch.” Wilbur does a little chef’s kiss. “Very bold. Powerful. Goes wonderfully with a steak.”

“What the fuck is going on?” Dream shrieks.

Wilbur’s expression abruptly changes. “Right!” He points a finger at Techno. “You betrayed us.”

“But I didn’t! I would never miss a chance to make money.” Techno gestures rather pointedly in Dream’s direction. “I was kidnapped. Without my consent.”

Both boys stop, then share a look between them. It’s quite obvious that neither of them even considered the possibility that Techno had been captured. Techno is honestly a little offended at the assumption that he’d be so cheap as to miss a money-making opportunity to do something as stupid as hanging out with friends. As *if*. “Are you sure?” Wilbur asks slowly.

“This asshole broke into my house this morning and shot me with a tranquilizer dart. Yeah, I’m sure.”

“It wasn’t a tranquilizer,” Dream mutters. “Just a mild paralysis agent. I have no idea why you passed out. That’s on you, dude.”

Techno gives him a snide smile. “My body never passes up the chance for rest.”

“Whatever!” Wilbur snaps. “These guys *kidnapped* you?”

Techno nods. Immediately, Tommy jumps up and launches himself into his arms, wailing dramatically. “I knew you wouldn’t betray us! I knew it!” His little wings begin to flap erratically, forcing Techno to bear hug him before he sent the both of them toppling over. Though admittedly, Techno can’t help but enjoy his freakish glee, even as he pummels Techno’s lower back with his heels in excitement. Wilbur, however, still looks hesitant. He turns to Dream and Sapnap, who immediately freeze up and strike defensive poses. “Is this true? You kidnapped Techno?”

“No,” Dream says.

“Yes,” Sapnap says at the same time. It earns him a swift elbow to the side. He elbows Dream back. “You said we aren’t supposed to lie!”

“You can lie to villains!” Dream says through his teeth. “These are my nemesis’s kids!”

“Nemesis?” Wilbur raises an eyebrow. “My dad doesn’t have a nemesis.”

“Yes he does,” Dream replies. “It’s me.”

“I would definitely know if my dad had a nemesis. Who even are you?”

“I’m Dream! The most well-known superhero in this city?”

Wilbur turns back to Techno, looking wholly unimpressed. Techno only shrugs. “I don’t know, man. He just broke into my house.”

“You have to know who I am!” Dream motions to his face. “Smile mask? Ringing any bells?”

Wilbur shakes his head. “Nope.”

Dream deflates a little. “Damn it.”

Tommy rests a hand on his Techno’s shoulder and pushes himself out of his arms. “Let me handle this.” He swaggers forward with his wings fluffed up like a seagull that’s just been hit by lightning. “You kidnapped my bestest buddy Techno,” He says, punctuating the end of his sentence with an aggressive point of his finger. “For that, you must *die* .”

*Oh, good lord* , Techno thinks, but Dream goes white as a sheet. For every pace Tommy stalks towards him, he takes one backwards. “I don’t want to hurt you, Caillou from Hell, but I will if you come any closer.”

Tommy bares his teeth. “As if death could stop me from kicking your ass.”

“Yeah!” Wilbur adds. “Didn’t stop me!”

“Dream?” Sapnap says nervously. “I’m getting George. This shit is freaking me out.”

“No!” Dream stops him from running off with a sharp wave of his hand. The whole scene looks a bit like something from *Jurassic Park*, if all the dinosaurs were replaced by furious, feathery grade-schoolers. Techno reckons that would probably actually be scarier than regular dinosaurs. Regular dinosaurs can’t memorize your credit card information. “They’re just children. It doesn’t need to come to that.”

“They’re children with wings!” Sapnap hisses. “And murderous intent!”

“I also have diseases,” Tommy snarls. “And rocks.”

Dream shakes his head. “I’ll never forgive myself if I unleash George on an innocent child.”

“What part of this fucking kid looks innocent to you?” Sapnap presses. “He ate your hoodie like it was a fucking breakfast burrito!”



Tommy grins, running his tongue over his sharp little teeth. “I love polyester.”

“See?” Sapnap motions to him, wide-eyed. “That’s, like, the third time he’s mentioned that!”

“It doesn’t matter. He’s just a kindergartener.” Dream beckons Tommy closer, eyes glinting bravely. “I can take him on.”

As it turns out, that is possibly the worst thing Dream could have said. Tommy’s face changes, splitting with nine-year-old fury. Before Dream can do anything but rear back in terror, Tommy lunges for him, swings a leg upwards, and lands a solid, devastating kick to his crotch. *Oh, fuck. Ow.* Dream crumples; the rest of them stumble back as though they’d just watched a murder. Even Wilbur looks taken aback by his brother’s cruelty. “Actually,” Tommy says. “I’m in grade three. That’s, like, ten years older than kindergarten.”

“Tommy,” Wilbur whispers. “You just hit his nuts.”

Dream is still in a heap on the floor, limp. Had he not been moaning under his breath, Techno would have thought him to be in the early stages of rigor mortis. “Sapnap?” His voice is pitifully hoarse. “Go get George. I want this toddler wiped off the fucking map.”

“Yes, sir!” Sapnap is gone in a blur of panda-print pyjama pants. It’s only a moment before he returns with a rather bothered-looking George in tow. He pushes his friend forward, grinning victoriously. “Go on, George. Get ‘em.”

George meets Techno’s gaze, looking perplexed. “Not me!” Techno raises his hands hurriedly. “You’re fighting the nine-year-old.”

George at least has the decency to look a little taken aback at that, but his hesitation is momentary. He pulls a baseball bat from the pocket of his sweatpants. Techno isn’t sure how the fuck he did that. He doesn’t ask.

“Finally,” Tommy whispers. “A formidable enemy. Our battle will be legendary.” He looks to Techno, giving him a devious smile. “Say the words.”

Techno has no clue what he’s talking about. “Huh?”

“Say the words. You know, the—“ Tommy makes a little punching motion— “Those words.”

“Tommy, George flashbanged every last braincell I had right out of my skull. I’m not following.”

Tommy turns back to George, who’s waiting patiently for him to finish his spiel, and gives him an apologetic grimace. “Sorry. He’s very stupid.”

George gives him an understanding nod. It’s so understanding, in fact, that both Sapnap and Dream sneak him rather offended glances. George either fails to notice or simply doesn’t care about either of them.

“Okay.” Tommy throws a stern glance at Techno over his shoulder. “The words that make me allowed to kick people’s butts. I love...”

“Money? Wait, no.” Techno is genuinely starting to get a little embarrassed. *Oh god. Maybe the caffeine is killing my braincells faster than I had anticipated.* To his relief, it finally hits him a second later. “Oh! Oh, I got it. I got it.” He breathes in. “Tommy, I love taxes.”

The air grows cold around them, like in the moments before a stroke of lightning. Goosebumps rise along the back of Techno’s neck. He looks down at the coffee table next to him, where a glass sits still half-filled with a miscellaneous energy drink, and sees ripples breaking the filmy surface. Wilbur grabs him by the arm. “Take cover!” The boy bellows. A buzzing sound invades Techno’s ears. “Now!”

They’ve only just managed to duck behind the nearest couch when the blast hits. It’s more of a shock wave than anything, and the force of it hits Techno like a brick to the face. He and Wilbur are thrown backwards into the wall, and the floor beneath them shudders as the shockwave runs through it. Every window in the house shatters outwards. From the ruckus around them, Techno is sure every cabinet and cupboard has gone flying open too. Though the explosion only lasts a second, he lays crumpled against the wall for what feels like hours, wondering if he’s finally been swept into death’s sweet, sweet embrace.

Nope. Wilbur pulls Techno’s eye open with two fingers. “Wakey-wakey,” he whispers. “It’s over.”

*Damn it.* Straightening, Techno shakes dust and shattered glass from his hair. Wilbur crawls over the overturned couch and disappears into the plumes of dust. *Next time’s the charm, I guess.*

The living room is what Techno can only describe as a war zone. Every piece of furniture (though there admittedly aren’t many) has been knocked over, broken in half, or thrown across the room. Pieces of the cheap popcorn ceiling lay shattered upon the floor. Techno is pretty sure he can hear a tornado siren wailing somewhere off in the distance, but perhaps that’s just from the tinnitus he’s definitely developed from all this. In the center of all the chaos, miraculously untouched by even the smallest speck of dust, stand Tommy and George. They’re in the exact same positions they’d been left in, though George’s baseball bat has disappeared. Tommy seems to be chewing something. Techno hopes those two facts aren’t related.

“Impressive,” George murmurs. He’s British. That’s unexpected.

“I can say the same to you,” Tommy replies, shaking out his wrists. “Although your form could use a little improvement.”

Sapnap struggles to his feet behind the kitchen island, groaning. “Anyone else feel like they’re playing Pokémon on acid?”

Tommy claps his hands excitedly. “I love acid. It’s so useful.”

“No acid in this household of any kind,” Dream grunts. He rises to his feet, shaking bits of plaster from his hair. “That’ll be all, George.”

Looking satisfied, George gives a little bow and turns away. He walks across the living room, unbothered by the shattered remains of a table he has to step over, and disappears down the hall. Everyone stares at him as he leaves. It's weird. It gets even weirder when Sapnap turns to Dream and says, "You have a weird taste in men."

"Shut the fuck up, Sapnap."

"I'm just saying."

"Boys!" Tommy claps his hands again. "This has been wonderfully entertaining, but I'm afraid that Wilby and I must be taking Techno and getting home now. Our dad doesn't know we're here, and—"

"What?" Techno and Dream say in unison.

"Ah, yeah." For the first time all day, Tommy looks a little sheepish. Perhaps it's just because his brother is giving him the death glare of the century. "We... snuck out."

"Tommy," Wilbur says through gritted teeth.

"Oh, good god." Techno rubs his brow with his fingers. "Is your dad out looking for you guys right now?"

Wilbur shrugs. "Probably. I left him a note telling him we were avenging him and to not expect us to come home alive."

"Why the hell would you write that?"

Wilbur shrugs again. "It was a very emotional moment."

"The Black Crow can't find us here," Dream says. "This location is top-secret."

"Fuck that! We live a block from the university, Dream!" Sapnap cries. He throws his hands into his hair. "If The Black Crow finds us, we are fucked. My GPA can't take me dying."

Tommy takes a couple menacing steps forward, and Dream and Sapnap retreat behind their kitchen island. "Oh, he's going to kick your asses. I'll tell him you guys beat me to death with a potato."

"A potato?" Dream asks shakily. "Why a potato?"

Tommy narrows his beady eyes. "You seem like the kind of fucked-up bastard to beat a kid to death with a root vegetable, Dream."

"What?" Dream flounders for a second. "You're deranged."

Wilbur darts to Techno's side and tugs on his sleeve. "He's also going to kick our asses when he finds out we snuck out, so you need to stick up for us and take the blame. He'll be less mad if it was your idea."

“Less mad?” Techno balks. “He’s your dad. If he thinks I put you guys up to this, he’ll vaporize me or lock my consciousness inside a snail or something.”

“George did that once,” Sapnap says.

Techno waves him off. “I’m telling Phil the truth — that you guys thought I skipped out on work and came to tear me limb from limb like a pack of angry vultures. It’s a very reasonable answer on its own.” He pulls Wilbur in front of him and brushes some dust off his yellow sweater. “Let’s at least collect ourselves before he gets here. We have plenty of time before he finds us.”

*Thwoomp.* Something lands in the shattered windowsill behind him. Techno doesn’t even bother turning around. “I jinxed it, didn’t I?”

Dream nods. His eyes are stuck somewhere above Techno’s head. “Yeah, bud.”

A cold hand clamps down on Techno’s shoulder. Wilbur, squeaking, goes to run away, but he’s grabbed by the back of the sweater and pulled back to Techno’s side. Tommy skitters away on all fours and joins Sapnap and Dream behind the kitchen island. “Hi, Phil,” Techno says awkwardly. The side profile of Phil’s black bird mask leans into his peripheral view. *God, that thing is fucking horrifying.* “How’s your afternoon been?”

The mouth of Phil’s bird mask opens with a chittering squeak. “*You missed work.*”

“You know, I was actually having a wonderful conversation with your sons about that,” Techno says. “If you would just give me a moment to—“

Tommy pops up over the kitchen island, dragging Dream up as well by the hair. “This guy beat me to death with a carrot.”

“You said it was a potato the first time,” Dream grumbles.

Phil’s mechanical breathing sharpens into a hiss. He goes goes to lunge forward, but Techno snatches him by the beak. “He did no such thing, I promise. If Tommy were to be vanquished by a vegetable, it would obviously be a leafy green.”

Phil takes a moment to consider it, then tilts his head in agreement. Techno hesitantly lets go of his beak. “*You know him better than I do,*” He chuckles.

“And you know me better than to think I’d miss an opportunity to make a couple thousand bucks just to go hang out with friends.” Techno gestures to Dream, who is futilely trying to pull Tommy’s fist out of his hair. “These guys aren’t even my friends. That guy says he’s your nemesis.”

Phil goes tense again, and Techno sees Dream straighten up in panic, dragging Tommy right off the ground. “I — yeah, I am!” He tries to look tough, but it’s hard with Tommy hanging off his head like an angry little hair clip. “I’m Dream. I’m your nemesis.”

“*I... don’t have a nemesis,*” Phil says. He flicks his mask off his face to study Dream closer. “I’ve never seen you before.”

“I’m Dream,” Dream repeats. “Smile mask. Green hoodie?”

“Just play along,” Techno whispers in Phil’s ear. “He’s sensitive.”

“Ah.” Phil straightens, then does a grand gesture with his hands. “Ah, yes! My longest adversary.” He shakes his fist. “You live in my deepest nightmares.”

Dream noticeably brightens. *I’m in a room full of criminals and idiots*, Techno laments silently. He steps aside to let Phil hop down from the windowsill, where his massive bird feet have left gouges in the wood and plaster below it. “This place looks awful!” Phil says. “It’s so—“

“Blown up?” Techno adds.

“Boring!” Phil crinkles his nose in disgust. “There’s hardly a piece of furniture in this whole place. At least the destruction gives the eye a little something to focus on.”

“We’re college students!” Sappnap says, offended. “Sorry we don’t have a million bucks to decorate.”

Phil clicks his tongue. “That’s what stealing is for, my friend.”

“We don’t steal—” Dream says, finally ripping Tommy’s away from his head. Tommy has a clump of dirty blonde hair clutched in his fist. “*Ow*. We’re the good guys. We don’t get paid for what we do, so we live humbly.”

“Oh, how respectable.” Phil’s tone is anything but respectful. “And you’re liars. You stole Techno Blade.”

“Just Techno,” Techno adds in, more out of habit than anything.

“That’s called taking a hostage. It’s different.” Dream pushes Tommy in Techno’s direction, scowling. “Sometimes bad things must be done for the good of the city.”

An awkward silence falls over them. Techno’s pretty sure he sees George skitter by on all fours in the shadow of the ruined kitchen, but he doesn’t pay too much attention to him. That guy’s obviously on a mission of his own. “So, what now?”

“What now?” Dream asks.

“Yeah. What now?” Techno motions to Phil. “You’ve got The Black Crow right here in your house. Aren’t you going to try and vanquish him?”

Dream gives him a wide-eyed look. “Am I—“ He jolts. “Oh! Oh. Right. Right.” He scurries behind the kitchen island, rummages in a drawer, then re-emerges with a full-sized axe in his hands. “Sappnap, help me out.”

Sappnap, still crouched at the other end of the kitchen island, fidgets uncomfortably. “Sappnap,” Dream repeats. “I said to help me *out*.”

“I got school tomorrow, dude,” Sapnap whines. “This is going to take all night. Can’t we do this another time?”

Dream turns to his friend incredulously. “Another night? We have The Black Crow right here in our living room! We could get him off the streets for good!”

“He’s got his two little weirdos and Techno with him, though! We’re outnumbered.”

Dream grits his teeth. “Sapnap, you’re *embarrassing* me—“

“I’m just thinking of logistics!”

“I have a reputation to uphold!”

Once again, Dream sounds uncomfortably close to tears. Phil groans under his breath. “I hate Computer Science majors,” he mumbles to Techno. “They’re always so dramatic.”

Dream turns in place, eyes wide. “How’d you know I was an Computer Science major?”

Phil gives him an apologetic smile. “It bleeds off you, my friend.”

Dream looks like he’s just been punched in the face. “Alright.”

Phil pulls his lips tight over his teeth in the quintessential ‘uncomfortable-white-person’ smile. Perhaps Dream’s down-to-earth (read: pathetic) aura is a little too much for his fatherly instincts to bear. “If it works better with you, I can schedule another date to.... Run into you, per say, and we can continue this most enthralling battle then. Would that make you feel better?”

Dream lets the axe fall to his side and nods rather sulkily, keeping his eyes trained on the floor. “There we go.” Phil slides a hand into his black trench coat and pulls out a little leather-bound planner. It’s got *Murder Brings The Murder Together* <3 emblazoned on the front in flowery writing. “Evenings, I assume?”

“Yeah,” Dream says quietly. “We have classes in the mornings.”

“Hm.” Phil clicks his tongue. “I’m free next Thursday after five.”

“How late are you willing to be out? I’ve got a class until eight-thirty on Wednesdays,” Sapnap says.

Phil quirks his lip. “Not too late; I’ve got to be there to put the boys to bed.”

“What about Tuesday?” Dream asks. “That’s our only day off.”

Sapnap makes a little noise in the back of his throat. “Tuesday nights are Karl’s movie nights. You know he’ll throw up and cry if we miss Kung Fu Panda 2.”

Dream groans. “I’m booked up every other evening. Book club doesn’t play around.”

Techno raises his hand. "I can take night duty if you want. That'll free up a couple hours on Wednesday."

"Oh, would you? That'd be amazing." Phil pats Techno on the back. It hurts; Tommy's sonic boom definitely broke a rib or two. "You're too good to me, Techno Blade."

"Are you sure you're okay with that?" Dream asks hopefully. "I'd hate to take up too much of your time."

"I'm making money, dude. That's a good night to me," Techno replies. "Also you literally kidnapped me today, so—"

"Wednesday at nine it is." Phil scribbles something into his planner with a black fountain pen. "I personally loved the Big Man gas station across town. The acoustics were just splendid. If you two are able to get there in time, I would love to make use of that space again."

"I love that place!" Sapnap says happily. "The dude there gives me my slushies for thirty cents no matter the size."

"That works perfect, thank you." Dream gives Techno a quick grin and a thumbs-up. "And thank you, Techno."

"Thank you, Techno," Sapnap echoes.

Techno shrugs bashfully. "I'm always here to save the day."

Phil flips his planner closed and slides it back into his coat. "Well!" He claps his hands on his thighs. "I say we pack it in, folks. We should be heading out. I want to get home before the military starts bringing in the helicopters."

Tommy grabs onto his dad's sleeve and points out the window. "Can me and Wilbur go outside and play in the glass? Please?"

"Fine, but don't eat too much of that junk. Kristin's robbing that restaurant we were supposed to go to and bringing home some takeout tonight."

"I fucking love stolen food!" Wilbur cheers, pushing his brother out of the way and flinging himself out the window. Tommy follows after him, shrieking in excitement. The rather unique sounds of children playing in a sea of broken glass drift up from the pavement below. Phil turns away, listening to it as though it were the loveliest sound in the world. Dream twists his mouth in disgust. Sapnap looks a little upset he can't go out and join them.

"Kids and shiny things. Not a better pairing out there." Phil turns back, chuckling warmly. "Am I right, boys?"

"Yeah," Dream answers, but he's a bit too bewildered for his agreement to sound genuine. Sapnap's emphatic nod, however, most definitely comes from the heart.

Phil lets out a long, happy sigh, then sits on the corner of the overturned couch. “Now that the boys are occupied, I just wanted to make something clear here. We’re all adults; I figure the importance of clear communication is understood, yes?”

Everyone nods. “George is great at communicating too,” Sapnap says. “If he bites us, that means he doesn’t like what we’re doing. It’s so simple.”

Phil raises his eyebrows, impressed. “How very avant-garde of him. Well, extend this message to him too.” He leans forward, planting his elbows on his thighs. “If Techno Blade ever misses a shift because of you guys again, I will slather you in honey and pop rocks, throw you into Tommy’s room, and then lock the door behind me. Have I made myself clear, gentlemen?”

Dream and Sapnap give him silent, sullen nods, but Phil doesn’t seem satisfied. “Use your words. Can I have a ‘yes, Mr. Murder’?”

“Yes, Mr. Murder,” Dream and Sapnap repeat in muttered unison.

“Good lads. Perhaps if you put forth a valiant effort at beating me, I shall think about buying everyone slushies.” He points a finger at Sapnap, whose face lights up. “I said I’ll *think* about it.”

“Okay,” Sapnap says, fighting a grin. “Cool.”

“I’m going to wrangle my boys and get them ready to go.” Phil stands, brushes the wrinkles from his black slacks, then hefts himself back into the windowsill. That thing’s going to need hundreds of dollars in repairs. Dream should just leave it as a big hole in the wall at this point. “Behave yourselves in my absence.”

Dream nods, smiling, but he deflates like a balloon the moment Phil flies out of earshot. “Oh, my god.” He buries his face in his hands. His axe clatters to the floor. “I need to go to bed. Or take a bath. Or get medicated.”

“I still have to do my Roman history essay,” Sapnap says tiredly.

“I’ll be out of you guys’ hair soon. Phil should give me a ride home.” Techno sticks his head out the open window. Phil’s perched on a nearby lamppost, watching Tommy shovel pieces of broken glass into his mouth on the pavement below. “Can I have a ride home?” He calls out. “I don’t want to pay for an Uber.”

“Are you going to puke again?” Phil asks.

“Oh, definitely,” Techno replies.

Phil snaps his fingers. “Then *yes* .”

“Cool!” Techno turns back to Dream. “Do you have social media?”

“I have Discord and Reddit,” Dream says with a smile.



“Of course you do. My Discord username is *TechnoThePig#4350*, if you want to add me. I have Minecraft installed on my laptop at home.”

“We love Minecraft!” Sapnap exclaims. “We have a server with all of our friends on it. You should join.”

Dream laughs nervously. “Well, I still have to vet you a little bit. You *are* connected to some of the biggest villains in the country—“

“Don’t you want me as a friend, though? I have so much insider information.” Techno begins to turn on his heel. “If you don’t, that’s fine, but…”

“Wait!” Dream glances furtively back at Sapnap, then pushes at his brow with his hand. “Fine. But only if you promise to answer any *and* all questions that I have about The Black Crow. Do we have a deal?”

Techno sticks his hand out. Dream takes it a little too enthusiastically. “Deal. I’m also a god at close-quarters PVP and farming.”

Dream laughs. “From the two hundred private browsers you have open on farming tips, I could tell.”

Techno feels his face go red. “Don’t air out a guy’s business like that, dude. My boss is outside.”

*Thwoomp.* Phil lands in the windowsill, Tommy and Wilbur clinging to his back like a pair of little possums. “Ready to go?” He says.

“Yup. I need to get into bed and sleep off the concussion George definitely gave me.” Techno takes a step into Phil’s waiting arms and feels them tighten around his torso like a carnival ride. His stomach is already preemptively churning. *This is great.*

“I was serious when I said to not sleep off a concussion,” Dream says worriedly.

“Pssh. I’ll be fine.” Techno dismisses him with a wave. “I heard anthrax is a wonderful concussion cure.”

“That is definitely not true,” Sapnap pipes in.

“I’ll make it true, just for Techno Blade.” Phil’s wings open with a loud whoosh. “Goodbye, my great nemeses. I look forward to vanquishing you on the battlefield next week.”

Dream waves, stifling a yawn. “Bye, Phil. See you in class tomorrow, Techno.”

Phil turns, lifting Techno off his feet as he steps back into the shattered windowsill, but a question pops into Techno’s head just as he’s preparing to take off. “Wait! Dream, I have a question,” He cries, twisting in Phil’s arms. “You must know Badboyhalo.”

“Of course I do,” Dream says. “He was my guide during frosh week. That basically makes him my dad.”

“Is he a superhero?”

Dream scoffs. “Duh.”

Techno grins all the way home. He even grins while he’s puking. *Vindication.*

~

Phil ends up paying him 500\$ an hour to play Minecraft with Dream and his gaggle of hero friends. *For keeping my nemeses off my back*, he tells him, vibrating with the maniacal excitement that only cooking up a devious plan gives him. *It’s a very useful service. So worth the money.*

Yeah — for such a terrifying villain, Phil can’t lie for the life of him. Techno knows it’s just because he likes to see him socialize. He likes to see him have friends, heroes or not. Not only are friends a wonderful source of insider information, but they can be fun too sometimes. Dream never exactly forgives Tommy for clarting him in the ballsack with the force of a thousand suns, but he does eventually allow him to play on their shared Minecraft server with Techno’s supervision. That ends up backfiring a little, as Tommy is ever the more incensed to cause trouble when he’s got Techno looming over his shoulder. Tommy calls it his ‘villain instinct’. Techno calls it being nine years old. Perhaps the two are more one in the same than expected.

Over the sound of Dream loudly bitching into his headset one lazy Saturday afternoon, Techno hears someone knock on his door. It’s a bit unexpected; he isn’t expecting any visits from the landlord, and Tommy and Wilbur tend to come in through the windows. “Hold that thought,” he says, bringing Dream’s rant about Minecraft physics to a sudden halt. “Someone’s just knocked on my door.”

“If it’s your stinky little children friends, tell them I expect to see my pet fish back in his pond outside my base by the next sundown or I’m blowing up Tommy’s underground torture chamber,” Dream replies.

“Will do.” Techno knows full well that fish ended up in Tommy’s furnace days ago, but he’ll just spawn another one in. He’s already three times without either of them noticing. “Be back in a second.”

He slides off his headphones and puts them on the desk, right between a nightshade sprout Tommy gave him in a recycled energy drink can and a framed photo of the three of them Phil had given him for his past birthday (he knows there’s a camera hidden in there, but he doesn’t mind all that much. Body-doubling has done wonders for his ADHD). He walks to the door, then looks through the peephole. He doesn’t see anyone. *Could still be Tommy and Wilbur*; he thinks. *I wouldn’t put it past them to trick me into turning my back on my computer.*

He opens the door. There’s a single white envelope sitting on his welcome mat. There are also two hysterically giggling children hiding behind the plant at the corner of the hall, but Techno pretends not to notice them. Breaking the black wax seal, he gives the envelope a precursory sniff for any anthrax. When his braincells don’t immediately burst like popcorn kernels, he feels safe enough to pull the lone letter out and unfold it.

***We're Tying The Knot! (Around Your Neck)***

Techno smiles. "Classy."

*Phillip Murder and Kristin Dark'ness Dementia Raven Rosales would love your presence (and money) in celebrating their marriage, where absolutely nothing bad or illegal will happen.*

*Date: Classified*

*Locations: You Know*

*Reception to follow; please RSVP with secret code to ensure you're not a member of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Royal Canadian Mounted Police force (RCMP) or the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Guests who provide gifts under 200\$ will be dealt with via firing squad.*

"The secret code is 'I love taxes'," Tommy suddenly giggles straight into Techno's ear. "I made that one up."

Techno ignores how close he just was to pissing his pants and turns to Tommy with a little smile. He's hanging off the top of his doorframe like a little sloth. "Good to know."

Tommy drops onto Techno's backs and wraps his skinny little arms around his neck. "Are you going to come?"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world."

"Good!" Wilbur smacks him on the back. Like Tommy, Techno did not see him approach. At this point, a respectable bit of teleportation is standard business. "You're going to be Dad's best man."

Techno balks. "What?"

"Don't worry, he'll pay you." Wilbur nods as though it's obvious. "He and Mumza were fighting on who was going to have you in their bridal party."

"Oh. Cool." *I haven't even met this woman in real life yet. I'm half convinced she'll vaporize me on the spot out of excitement the first time we meet.* "By the way, you guys calling her Mumza is so cute."

"She's awesome," Tommy says with a grin. "She told me that if I ever need a tragic backstory to hold up in court, she'll throw herself into the ocean so I can tell people she *died*."

“That’s less cute, but very forward-thinking of her.” *Maybe it’s the villainous version of saving money away for their education?* Techno, like for most things, is past the point of questioning. Tommy continues to look starstruck, so he’ll just assume it’s a great honour to have a parent die for the express purpose of fulfilling a tragic backstory. It does sound pretty badass, now that he thinks it over. “Would you guys die for me if I needed a tragic backstory?”

Wilbur gasps and grabs Techno’s wrist. “I can go outside and run in front of a car right now if you need me to.”

Techno’s heart leaps into his throat. *Nope! Nope nope nope!* “Not now!” He says quickly. “Can’t have you looking too corpse-y for your dad’s big day. I’ll call you up if I need your services.”

Wilbur looks slightly disappointed, but he nods nonetheless. “Grey would actually look wonderful with the planned colour scheme, but alright. If you want to be boring about it.”

“Boring is my middle name,” Techno says.

“I thought it was ‘Blade’,” Tommy replies.

“That’s part of my full first name. It’s all one word.”

“Why does Dad say it like two words then?”

Techno shrugs. “Continuity comedy?”

There’s a stretch of awkward silence. *Maybe a little too meta for them,* Techno thinks. He swiftly changes the subject. “Who wants to go bully Dream over Minecraft?”

“Me!” Tommy’s nails dig into the flesh of his neck just hard enough to hurt. “I wonder if he’s got a new fish yet,” he says through the foam dribbling from his lips.

*I need to get that kid a scratching post . And a rabies vaccine.* “ Oh, I bet he will soon.” Techno bumps his door farther open with his hip and gestures inside, leaning down so Tommy can scuttle off his back. “After you, tiny scary gentlemen.”

“I’m not a gentle man,” Tommy huffs as he struts by. “I’m a hard man.”

“Of course you are. No drinking my energy drinks!”

Wilbur slips a one hundred dollar bill into Techno’s back pocket as he ducks under his arm, and Techno smiles. “Changed my mind. Fridge is free game.”

He hears the brothers high-five each other behind his back, and the sick sense of satisfaction that floods him reminds him a little of Phil. Maybe he’s rubbing off on him more than he realizes. *Gets them every time.*

Techno slides the letter back into its envelope and tucks it under his arm. *Phil’s wedding,* he thinks to himself. *Can’t even imagine what an affair like that would look like.* An odd thought

overtakes him as he closes his apartment door behind him. Tommy's already at his desk chair, hurtling death threats into the microphone. *Is Phil going to try and pull anything on me?*

He shrugs it off. No sense in thinking too much about it now. He's got Minecraft to play.

His phone buzzes in his pocket. It's a text from Skeppy.

**Skeppy (dumbass)**

*U met dream!!!! Hes friends with bad!!!*

*Yeah I did*

*he told me bad was a superhero*

*fuck off*

*hes a bitch ass liar and a dumbass*

*never talk to him again*

*birch*

*birch*

*FUCK*

*bitch*

Techno sighs. You can't win them all.

## Chapter End Notes

no this didn't take two months shut the hell up

WE ARE DONE!!!! Thank you everyone for the support. Forgive me for the delays; school and mental health have really been breaking my funny bones lately. But we're here, we're probably all queer, and it's 9 days before my dog's 14th birthday. things are looking up :) i may have COVID but things are still somehow better than they were a month ago lol

I am no longer on Twitter because fuck that app lmao, so if you want to contact me, you can find me on [Tumblr](#) or [The Writer's Block](#) Discord! The comments and support I've

received here have kept me going when i felt so down. You're all such lovely, well-spoken people. If I find the motivation to do a spin-off, I'll put every bit of energy into making you guys laugh again. I enjoyed making this story so much. I love you all <3

fun fact: the series they're reading in Dream's book club is the Percy Jackson series. They're halfway through The Battle Of The Labyrinth. Tears have been shed.

until next time. get your rabies vaccines!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!